

### Objective vs. subjective precarity and the problem of family institutionalization: theoretical approaches and empirical insights

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# Objective vs. Subjective Precarity and the Problem of Family Institutionalization. Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Insights

Daniel Baron

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

To a rising extent employers are put under pressure to keep up with international standards as a consequence of global competition in working and production processes; thus established employment levels are at stake (Dörre 2011, Mückenberger 1996). Fixed-term employment in particular – but also part-time employment, subcontracted labour, and temporary employment – seems to supersede permanent employment contracts, nowadays (Keller/Seifert 2013). Fixed-term employment usually interferes with private as well as work-related plans for the future (Allmendinger/Hinz 2009, Blossfeld/Drobnic 2001b, Blossfeld/Hofmeister 2005); in terms of family sociology this leads to the question whether the experience of being employed as a fixed-term worker influences institutionalization processes of partner relationships?

Drawing on Dörre's theory of capitalist *langrab* as well as rational choice approaches to individual high-cost decisions (McGinnis 2003, Mensch 2000) and partnership institutionalization (Rusbult 1980, Rusbult et al. 1998) it will be argued that being employed in a fixed-term-contract leads to prolonged institutionalization in the course of relationships, especially when it comes to high-cost decision such as purchasing a real estate, giving birth to the first child in a relationship or marrying. Assuming that young adults to a certain extent base partnership decisions on their subjective perception of their work situation, the decision to institutionalize their partnership (King/Christensen 1983) should, therefore, be delayed more strongly by those partners who work under fixed-term contracts than by those who are employed in permanent contracts.

The sample of the main survey that is the data basis for this study includes 1,083 participants at the age of 20 to 35 years who are currently either a fixed-term employee or a permanent employee and who are engaged in a relationship lasting at least six months.<sup>2</sup> Within that study event-history-data concerning peoples' employment and relationship histories was collected, measuring for how long exactly they experienced fixed-term employment situations. Using these event-history-data Kaplan-Meier estimates will be calculated during later sections of this paper (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 72-76), thereby using stratified covariates such as sex, educational level or gender role attitudes. Here, a recently designed scale measuring subjective precarity (Baron et al. 2013) is being applied during the study to test for effects of perceived precarity on time till realization of partnership decisions. Objective precarity is measured as the share of time spent working under fixed-term contracts during collected occupational biographies.

Empirical analyses during this paper will first concentrate on bivariate statistics with a general model of partnership institutionalization model being tested using seven partnerships events as dependent variables: first joint vacation, cohabitation, establishing a kitty, establishing a private deposit, real estate purchase, transition to parenthood and

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mattia-Lisa and Ingmar Rapp for their helpful advices and critical remarks.

<sup>2</sup> The research project which this study is part of started in April 2012 and is funded by the German Research Association (HII 703/10-1/2). Data collection was conducted between November 2012 and March 2013.

marriage. Later, Gompertz models (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 186-196) will be calculated to test for empirical validity of hypotheses based on a multivariate approach.

Due to this study being of preliminary character models using more time-varying variables (Blossfeld et al. 2007, Cleves et al. 2010) will be conducted in future studies. For now, it is the main aim of this study to provide the key-ingredients of an empirical approach to examining partnership institutionalization processes in Germany based on a combination of macro-societal and action theoretical perspectives on labor market flexibilization and its (expected) consequences for partnership institutionalization processes.

## **2. Recent empirical findings**

During this section the often problematic implications of flexible forms of working arrangements for private life in general and partnership and family institutionalization processes in particular will be illustrated referring to recent empirical findings. Thus it provides an overview over the current research on flexibilization of employment relationships, focusing on effects of the aforementioned spheres of social life. During this section it should become clear what the *sociological explanandum* will be during later theoretical considerations as well as empirical examinations.

### **2.1 Trends towards flexibilization of employment relations in Germany**

When looking at current political and sociological debates precarious work seems to have serious impacts on formation and stabilization of families in western societies (Mückenberger 1989, 1996). Although a wide span of issues has been addressed during these discussions it is still unclear in how far objective and subjective dimensions of precarity, especially when being connected to working under fixed-term contracts, play an intertwining role when it comes to sociological explanations of the postponement of the realization of life-plans among young couples. This study focuses young adults' decisions to institutionalize their ongoing partnership as an indicator of defective institutionalization of partnerships in Germany based on a five-dimensional inventory (see section 4).

As can be seen from current studies on the structure of western labor markets, the proportion of fixed-term-contracts among all forms of employment relationships in Germany has increased from about three percent in 1991 to nearly nine percent in 2012 (Keller/Seifert 2013: 36f.). Adding to this development, more and more first-time employment happens to be under a fixed term contract. While in 2001 only 32 percent of young professionals had worked under a fixed term contract this share increased to 44 percent in 2012 (Hohendanner 2013: 3). Besides these statistical developments, the rise in fixed term contracts has been subject to a wide array of sociopolitical and public debates in Germany. As a response to flexibilization of employment laws and recruitment policy the classical employment relationship based on unlimited full time contracts has come under serious threat: Working under an open-ended full-time contract does not seem to be an unquestioned as well as feasible norm like it had been for most of the German employees for a long time since the end of World War II (Mückenberger 1996).

The current shifts towards more flexible forms of employment are often conceived of as the result of increasing economic competition among western societies for scarce sales markets and, foremost, budget-friendly labor power and production facilities (Holst 2013). Although the social mechanisms behind this development cannot be dealt with in detail during this study increasing public uncertainty whether socioeconomic standards could be maintained under these new flexible regime of employment policies can be understood as one central result of this process. During the next section, reviews of the current empirical literature studying the impacts of flexibilization on family institutionalization will thus shed light on the most important impacts of these precarious forms of employment relationships on individual life-planning as well as partnership and family institutionalization processes.

## **2.2 Consequences of flexibilization for private life and labor relations**

Most of the current studies concentrating on the interplay of working conditions and individual well-being revealed signs of disorganizing impacts of objectively precarious work – fixed-term contracts, part-time work, temporary employment – on private and family life resulting in actors searching for coping strategies to deal with these challenges (for an older overview see (De Cuyper et al. 2008)). Drawing on recent socio-psychological findings for the United States, there is a significant negative impact of precarious working contracts on employees' work-live-balance (Bohle et al. 2004), although LaMontagne et. al. (LaMontagne et al. 2014) report no significant effects of temporary work and fixed-term-contracts on mental health for Australian employees. Contrary to these findings Gundert (2014) found significantly lower rates of perceived affiliation among temporary and fixed-term workers in comparison to permanent workers when studying the effects of precarious work on employees' affiliation to society in Germany. Furthermore, Dörre and Popp report for German employees that actors who have experienced insecure labor market integration as a result of having been unemployed for certain spans of time during their occupational biographies feel more socially excluded than actors in regulated working arrangements or even actors who are still on educational or occupational training (Dörre et al. 2013, Popp/Schels 2011).

Indeed, flexibilization not only has severe consequences for private life-plans and feelings of affiliation to society. Furthermore, deregulating labor market standards leads to reorganization of labor relations – that is: affiliations among employees – as competition on the entrepreneurial level is passed onto to employees (Dörre 2009, Holst 2014). As recent empirical studies in industry sociology show, perceived stress due to (expected) employment in flexible working contracts often leads to fragmentation of solidarity and rise in competition among employees in classical fields of modern, western labor markets such as metal work or telecommunication (Holst 2012, 2013, 2014). Based on recent empirical findings for the United States (Grzywacz et al. 2002) as well as the aforementioned study for Germany (Gundert 2014) it can be assumed that labor market-induced insecurity and distress *spills over* to family life at a certain point in time and under circumstances that have to be examined further during this study.

### 2.3 Impacts on family institutionalization processes

First of all, what is the state of art when reviewing studies that focus the effects of precarious work on family institutionalization processes? Based on a US-American sample, particularly female employees working under temporary contracts reported a significantly higher tendency to transitioning to self-employment after having given birth to their first child (Bonet et al. 2013). This strategy was found to be occurring at a significantly higher rate among those women who reported high amounts of mental distress due to working under temporary contracts than among those who reported lower rates of mental distress while working under regular contracts (Bonet et al. 2013). Adding to that, Lozza et. al. (2013) found evidence that American employees of all ages react to working under irregular employment arrangements – here again temporary employment – by lowering their expectations towards realization of important life-plans such as going on a holiday, buying a new car, marrying or giving birth to a child. Furthermore, this positive correlation between objective precarity and lowering expectations towards realizing live-plans is positively mediated by subjective precarity, the latter being operationalized as perceived job-insecurity (Lozza et al. 2013).

In contrast to these results Teerling found no study that reported fixed-term contracts to have significant positive effects on time till birth of the first child (Teerling 2012) when reviewing studies focusing the impacts of working contracts on transition to parenthood in Germany. Even when differentiating between West and East Germany no significant effects on time till birth of the first child occur (Gebel/Giesecke 2009). The same result holds true for a study by Kurz et. al. (2005) analyzing the impact of fixed-term contracts on transition to parenthood among young adults in Germany that was not included in Teerling's otherwise illuminating overview. In a more recent study Schmitt (2012) found out that working under fixed-term contracts exerts a significant effect on women's time till transition to motherhood in Germany. But this effect disappeared when the male breadwinner was added as a control variable (Schmitt 2012).<sup>3</sup>

While reviewing the empirical literature on the effects of fixed-term contracts on family institutionalization it became apparent that these studies most often concentrate on fertility decisions as a dependent variable for institutionalization. Other items of operationalization of family institutionalization such as time till marriage, time till cohabitation or time till real estate purchase could hardly be found, especially when it came to reviewing analyzes which deal with the aforementioned issues from a life course perspective. Therefore , a concluding view on a recent study dealing with the impacts of

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<sup>3</sup> Most recently another study using data from the German Socioeconomic Panel found that working under fixed-term contracts exerts a significant positive effect on time till birth of the first child, although this effect only occurred during women's occupational careers (Auer/Danzer 2014). Being a very worthwhile contribution in the field of empirical family studies this study used probit regression models to analyse fixed-term contracts' effects on time till birth of the first child (Auer/Danzer 2014: 15ff.). As this method is merely a generalization of the traditional linear regression model and thus hardly appropriate to event history models (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 5-13) results of the study should be taken with some precaution.

unemployment – as the most drastic form of insecure employment – on transition to parenthood (Kreyenfeld 2010, Kreyenfeld et al. 2012, Kreyenfeld et al. 2007) are in order.

Based on the German Socioeconomic Panel, Kreyenfeld studied the combined effects of objective job insecurity (measured as biographical experiences of unemployment), perceived socioeconomic distress and educational level on time elapsing till the birth of the first child among young women in Germany. Their main results reveal that lowly educated women suffering from unemployment gave birth to their first child significantly earlier than those on higher levels of education (Kreyenfeld 2010). She explained these findings by referring to Gary S. Becker's (1981) theory of human capital formation arguing that women on lower levels of education need not care to loose human capital profit by giving up on their educational and, consequently, occupational career to the same extent as women with higher educational level do (Kreyenfeld 2010: 353).

Although human capital theory as well as rational choice theory in general is a strong instrument for micro-sociobiological argumentation (Elster 1986b) Kreyenfeld's explanation lacks some important key-aspects. Most of all, the data Kreyenfeld relies on allows measuring perceived socioeconomic and job insecurity only in a very broad sense. For example, to shed light on perceived socioeconomic insecurity participants of the German Socioeconomic Panel are merely asked to estimate the extent to which they feel worried about the economic situation of the household they are living in. Although being a suitable indicator of interviewees' currently perceived economic situation it tells nothing about participants' personal views on the prospects of their economic situation in the foreseeable future or, at least, the perceived impact of their current economic situation on the realization of their private and family plans.

### **3. Theoretical propositions**

Drawing on the empirical background delivered so far it is assumed during this study that the shorter the shadow of security due to precarious work, especially fixed-term contracts, the longer young adults postpone realizing their life-plans. To make possible empirical analysis of this assumption an actor-centred, micro-sociological approach is needed (Coleman 1990) allowing testing for perceived precarity of actors being struck in fixed-term contracts rather than relying on objective, socio-structural indicators of precarious work exclusively. But to understand rationales of individual action in the lights of increasingly insecure labor markets it is helpful to start with some macrotheoretical remarks (sections 3.1 and 3.2). After having confronted these social theoretical propositions with microtheoretical considerations on family institutionalization processes (sections 3.3 and 3.4) I will provide an integrative model that comprises of normative as well as socioeconomic factors to explain for prolonged family institutionalization processes in times of rising occupational precarity (section 3.5).

#### **3.1 Subjective precarity in times of neo-capitalist landgrab**

Such a micro-sociological approach problematizing the impact of objectively precarious work on actors' daily living and working routines is inherent in the most recent studies on

*neo-capitalist landgrab* (“Kapitalistische Landnahme”) (Dörre 2011, 2012), although deeper linkages to sociological theories of action, particularly theories of preference formation and partnership-institutionalization (Lewis/Spanier 1982, Lewis/Spanier 1979, Rusbult 1980, Rusbult et al. 1998), has to be provided later during this study. For now, the processes of neo-capitalist landgrab can be understood “as contingent decisions, [that] create friction and contradictions, provoke counter-movements and mobilize protest and resistance” (Dörre 2011: 55). Other than during the process of *Fordist landgrab* these frictions occur as results of economic forces and political decision-makers struggling for meeting profit margins by undermining traditional institutions of the welfare state such as private pension systems, trade-unions and permanent work contracts by competing for fiercely contested foreign markets (Dörre 2011: 55f.). As a key result of this increasing financial competition on a global level economic pressure is directly passed onto the once objectively secure labor-force as well as on socially vulnerable groups – the Fordist welfare-state is bound for losing its socially safeguarding ties (Dörre 2011: 56).

There is a strong reason for assuming that actors react differently to these changing economic conditions depending on them being positioned on different socioeconomic levels. While labor-forces on higher ladders of the social strata – such as managerial classes or academics – may perceive unpredictability rather as dangers than as chances to fulfil their life-plans, actors on middle and lower levels might perceive reduced labor-market and welfare predictability as serious threats to their future plans (Dörre 2012: 147). Thus, the process of neo-capitalist landgrab produces winners and losers as well as subjects being situated in between these two extreme poles, occurring in large amounts, all of them facing more and more unpredictable working- and life conditions (Dörre 2012: 145ff.).

According to Robert Castel’s model of the three zones of the employment society (Castel 2008b, Dörre et al. 2006), which builds one of the main foundations for Dörre’s theory of neo-capitalist landgrab (Dörre et al. 2006). Labor-forces in financially and economically highly active societies can be analytically categorized into three different groups: (1) The “zone of the integrated”, consisting of all those workforces being economically and socially independent from the struggles of modern economies to compete in global markets; (2) The “zone of the disaffiliated”, consisting of socially excluded individuals such as long-time-unemployed, lowly educated, seriously ill and/or disabled individuals; and, between those two groups, (3) the “zone of precarity” where workforces’ occupational biographies are socially vulnerable and, hence, actors are seriously in danger of suffering mental distress and anxiety towards social descent due to being employed in irregular work contracts, i.e. fixed-term contracts, part-time or temporary work (Castel 2008a, Dörre et al. 2006: 2).

### **3.2 Family-institutionalization as a functional equivalent of capitalist landgrab?**

Keeping this categorization in mind, Dörre’s and Castel’s theory of neo-capitalist landgrab form the macro-analytical basis for action-theoretical approaches dealing with preference formation and life-planning in times of welfare states more and more losing their regulatory relevance. However, what is still missing in Dörre’s and Castel’s analyses is a detailed



approach to explain the aggregative consequence of individual preference formation for family institutionalization processes. If it is true, as Dörre and Castel assume, that an individual's position on the social strata determines his perception of objectively (non-)precarious employment arrangement – or, in a shorter term: his *class-consciousness* – there would be no use in sociologically explaining why actors realize their life-plans, i.e. getting married, going on vacation etc. the way they do. In a world fully painted in neo-marxist colours any young couples' decision would yield the same output, depending exclusively on actors' class-positions. Facing the challenges and threats of precarious work family would, at best, deteriorate to form a functional equivalent of neo-capitalist landgrab.

For a long time now, neo-marxists have struggled to overcome this inherent functionalist perspective that most often accompanies their sociological analyses (Elster 1979, 1982, 1985, Roemer 1982). It was indeed Jon Elster who came closest to theoretically overcome the problem of functionalism inherent in class-analysis by proposing to draw Neo-Marxism nearer to approaches in game theory (Elster 1982) as well as methodological individualism (Elster 1985: 5-8). But while claiming that Marx' could be read as a social theorist who "also was committed to methodological individualism" (Elster 1985: 7) he is in danger of falling back into the arms of structural functionalism when proposing that "[c]lasses should be defined by what people (in some sense) *have to do*, not by what they actually do. Xeonophon's gentleman-farmer who works on the farm 'for pleasure and for the sake of the physical and moral benefits such exercise can bestow, and not because economic necessity obliges him to work,' [...] does not belong to the same class as someone who must work his land himself." (Elster 1985: 324). Although giving an illuminating insight into different mechanisms of necessity to work among members of – seemingly – the same class, Elster's class concept is lacking of a stringent approach of methodological individualism: Rather than conceptualizing the social world as being the result of individual reasoning and acting, Elster here conceives actors as being determined by some higher force – here not class consciousness, but work. And with this concept in mind Elster is indeed more in line with Marx' historical materialism than with methodological individualism.

It would be too simple an exit from this analytical problem now to seek refuge in metaphysical constructions such as postulating that making and realizing life-plans in times of rising social insecurity is merely the outcome of socially and politically blind actors being struck in, what some radical Marxist commentators call, *errant class consciousness*.<sup>4</sup> Empirical evidence, indeed, allows posing a contrasting hypothesis: Facing the processes of labor market flexibilization and capitalist landgrab with all its challenging and sometimes even disastrous socioeconomic consequences, young adults incessantly stick to making life-plans, striving to build their homes not because, but *despite* being vulnerable to job-loss, precarization of life and downward social mobility (Deutschland 2010). Thus, making life-plans during times of neo-capitalist landgrab indicates that social blindness – or, in Marx' terms *delusion* – to certain degrees enables actors to temporarily overcome socioeconomic as

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<sup>4</sup> Guy Standing's recent studies on the *precarariat* give ostensive examples of this kind of argumentation (Standing 2011).

well as mental burdens posed by processes of neo-capitalist landgrab rather than paving the way for *wrong class consciousness* spreading around unboundedly.

From the standpoint of family sociology there already exists another, more appropriate analytical concept for this kind of delusion: *love*. Radical Marxists in the tradition of Friedrich Engels' brilliant essay on "The Origin of the Family" (Engels 1984) would strongly insist now that this notion of intimate emotions in partnerships seems out of place when it comes to discussing the effects neo-capitalist on family-life. Consequently, they would argue that *love is a bourgeois construct* that misleads actors in their perception that everything they do – from building a home to raising their children – is *not* driven by capitalist interests but by their own. Due to restrictions of space I cannot go into detailed discussion on this topic here, so a short clarification might be in order: Instead of posing a normative argument this positive notion of love mainly can be regarded as an analytical, albeit a somewhat romantic one. Thus, this study refrains from normatively discussing whether it is politically desirable or not for members of a certain society to retreat from public life into the sphere of family life with the aim of thereby overthrowing the regime of neo-capitalist landgrab.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.3 *Successful and unsuccessful family institutionalization processes*

The first step in discussing the social consequences of precarious work on actors planning and leading their private life is to assume that couples are indeed conscious of the social and economic conditions and challenges they are actually living in.<sup>6</sup> Thus, procrastination and prolongation of family institutionalization processes is always – at least to a certain extent – the result of individual reasoning *under the influence of some external restrictions as well as opportunities* (Coleman 1990: 27-44). Here, working contracts in general and precarious work in particular pose the main restrictions of analytical interest, with social actors striving to realize two "general human goals", namely those of securing physical well-being as well as attaining social approval (Lindenberg 1991: 34). In this context, building a home and founding a family is one of the key-means to arrive at realizing these two goals (Lindenberg 1991: 37), although the variety of alternatives for social actors to live together in life-long matrimonies have become larger during the last few decades (Hofmeister et al. 2008, Mills/Blossfeld 2003).

In the course of family institutionalization processes, partners exchanging non-material, partnership specific goods such as attentiveness, recognition, respect, affect, love and gifts as well as partners compounding to jointly invest in the material infra-structure of

<sup>5</sup> Up to the present day, heated debates among scholars in social philosophy and political theory focusing the problem of civil society are led concerning this question (Alexander 2008, Cohen/Arato 1992, Pitkin 1981). It was Hannah Arendt who in a very sophisticated attempt on Aristotelian and Roman as well as Kantian political philosophy (Arendt 2004) made plausible that a society in order to qualify as politically active one should never constrain its members to set the limits of their action to the boundaries of the *oikos* exclusively.

<sup>6</sup> From Boudieu's classic empirical studies on "Culture and Politics" we know that social consciousness of structural as well as behavioral restrictions is an analytically contest field (Bourdieu 2010: 398-467). Due to restrictions of space I cannot go into detail here.

their partnership, theoretically (Lewis/Spanier 1982, Lewis/Spanier 1979, Rusbult 1980), results in the stepwise stabilization of partnerships: The more and the longer both partners are able to, more or less, equally invest in the material as well as non-material infra-structure of a partnership, the more stable it gets.

In times of one partner not being able to invest his share due to low wages, insecure work, severe illness or general dissatisfaction with the partnership, it is up to the other one to increase his share and thereby to compensate for the first partner's lowered share (Lewis/Spanier 1982, Lewis/Spanier 1979). Here, it is critical for the maintenance of the partnership whether both partners believe in the success of both of them still living together and sharing their daily lives – even in times of economically induced crisis. If the partner who during times of crisis takes the heavy burden of compensating for the partnership' net-loss permanently loses his or her faith in the future stability of the partnership the affiliation runs a high risk of being quickly disbanded. Thus it is not so much the material dimension but the partners' subjective framing of the partnership which is decisive for the success of the institutionalization-process (Esser 2002a, b).

But what does *success of a family institutionalization processes* mean in times of increased occupational insecurity due to neo-capitalist landgrab? Back in the modern days of family sociology, the institutionalization process of a partnership was analytically understood as having run along a *successful* path when, at least, the first child had been born and partners had finally tied the knot (King/Christensen 1983). In more recent times, when pluralization of life forms is an undeniable empirical trend a clear definition of success of a partnership is getting more complicated. Although there are different forms of living together – classic two spouse/two-children families, lone mothers or fathers, homosexual partnerships, living-apart-together – most family sociologists stick to the term family as being reserved to describe long lasting affiliations of one man and one woman with at least one child, no matter whether a child has been adopted by the partners or has been naturally born by the couple's woman (Hill/Kopp 2013: 10). Due to this definition being a nominal one (Hill/Kopp 2013: 10f.) it does not – and cannot! – say anything about the *success of a partnership*. From the point of view of family sociology it is instead the matter of both partners to find out what it means to lead a successful partnership, although these considerations never happen outside the mesh of societal norms as well as private and public discourses.

From the perspective of historical materialism, giving a definition of success of family institutionalization processes appears to be a somewhat simpler task – at least at first sight: A family institutionalization process can be understood as being successful if it results in both partners realizing the forces that suppress them and both of them, consequently, taking appropriate measures to overcome this state of incapacitation. After fighting on their own for a while they would form alliances with fellow families to destroy capitalism and found the realm of Communism on the ruins of the bourgeois society. This outline resembles – in very rough form – Marx' and Engels' description of the development of the proletariat as a revolutionary class (Marx/Engels (1969) [1848]). But here, as in any historicist approach to

explain human action (Popper 2002 [1945]), serious analytical problems arise: In order to realize themselves as being caught in the disastrous machinery of neo-capitalism, families in times of precarious work either need to be historically determined doing so or they are in need of a political leader or organization telling them what neo-capitalist landgrab is all about and what to do against it. In this materialist conception, success of family institutionalization processes does not depend on the couples' reasoning and acting in the face of structural and socioeconomic forces then, but on unswayable historical and political entities exterior to the couples' actions. To put it in a nutshell: The more successful a social theory when it comes to exposing capitalism's contradictions to families living in times of precarious occupation the more successful young couples are when it comes to stabilizing their affiliations.

This top-down-approach obviously is in conflict with methodological individualism in general and state-of-the-art-theories of action in particular (Udehn 2002). If everyone was historically and politically determined in his or her reasoning there would be hardly any sense in explaining the varieties in duration of family institutionalization processes, because decisions to invest in the stabilization of a partnership would always have to be conceived of as the result of errant class consciousness. On the other hand, it would be shortsighted to conceive family institutionalization processes as being unsuccessful when both partners come to the conclusion that it would not worthwhile anymore to *invest* in the stabilization of their partnership. As we can see from the discussion between recent family sociological approaches and materialist perspectives, disbanding of intimate affiliation does not only come as a tragedy from both partners' perspectives, but also from society's point of view: With every disrupted family resulting from couples being threatened by insecure employment status and precarious working conditions neo-capitalism destroys the micro-ties of solidarity that actors are in need of when striving to achieve the "general human goals": physical well-being and social approval (Lindenberg 1991: 34).

### **3.4 Prolonged institutionalization as an indicator of weighing individual opportunities and restrictions**

But very often couples find suitable ways for arranging themselves and their partnerships with precarious working conditions instead of agreeing that it would be better to separate their ways and to get along with occupational insecurity on their own. Even today, when countless advocates of self-optimization do not get tired of preaching the benefits of not accepting too many compromises when it comes to building intimate relationships people do not refrain from taking the adventure to build a home and found a family (Illouz 2012). What is in need of sociological explanation then is the fact that young adults still affiliate, instead of leading a life on their own, although they would have some opportunities to do so while, in times of occupational insecurity, permanently running the risk of social downward mobility.

As recent empirical studies show, prolongation of institutionalization processes significantly occurs among young adults, especially women, with higher levels of education

(Kreyenfeld 2010). These findings are accompanied by empirical studies reporting a prolongation of time till birth of the first child among employed women in comparison to non-working women, although the causal direction of the effect is not always clear (Schröder/Brüderl 2008, Schröder/Pforr 2009). Furthermore, changes in gender role attitudes as well as in occupational participation of women have affected identities of young men, too, resulting in the male breadwinner model being contested by a plurality of life-forms and partnership arrangements, particularly in an East-German context (Wagner/Valdés Cifuentes 2014).<sup>7</sup>

In this context it seems reasonable to assume that transition processes to adulthood among today's young women and men are, to a certain extent, more challenging and, possibly, more insecure than those of young adults living in the post-war period when the traditional family model had been fairly uncontested by a then not yet existing plurality of life-forms.<sup>8</sup> Although recent empirical studies indicate that a fairly high share of young adults conceive the nuclear family still as a worthwhile arrangement of their private lives (Hill 1999, Hill/Kopp 2013: 49),<sup>9</sup> transition processes towards adulthood are becoming more and more "chaotic" (Blossfeld et al. 2008, Blossfeld/Hofmeister 2005). Especially in the fields of academic and creative work a comparatively high share of young adults in Germany report working under irregular contracts – fixed-term and part-time employment, working on a honorary basis or even being unemployed for a certain span of time – for several years before changing into a regular arrangement (Blossfeld/Drobnic 2001a, Blossfeld et al. 2001). Facing these flexible working conditions, actors are confronted with bringing their family model into accord with their career management which, under certain circumstances, might be perceived as being insecure leading to prolongation of family institutionalization processes.

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<sup>7</sup> Being consistent with current economic and rational choice theories of partnership formation (Becker 1973, 1981, Becker et al. 1977), these findings indicate a severe dilemma: on the one hand, feminist movements and theories fought for a change in gender role attitudes aiming at altering societies' normative as well as the juridical grounds, thus making it possible for today's women to participate to a far greater extent in the labor market than those women living a few decades ago (Kopp 2002: 100ff.). On the other hand, social policymaking as well as entrepreneurial and public reasoning in many instances lack behind these developments resulting in women disparately carrying not only the burdens of family- and childcare but also the weight of elusive future-plans on their shoulders (Blossfeld/Drobnic 2001a, b, Lozza et al. 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Strictly speaking this assumption is empirically untestable as it refers to historical nonevents: With regard to the level of social actions it is postulated that actors did not perceive uncertainty in the post-war period, because, on the societal level, plurality of life-form had not yet occurred (Elster 2007: 28). Thus, I can postulate that today's young adults in Western societies live under – subjectively – far more challenging employment conditions than older cohorts only on a normative basis. Here, rational choice theory's double bind – that of being both a normative and an explanatory theory at the same time (Elster 1986a, 1989: 1ff.) – is apparent.

<sup>9</sup> Within our sample (for sample description and methodical details see chapter 3.1) more than 90 percent of all interviewees reported that family life being is a very important private goal.

### 3.5 Normative and socioeconomic determinants of prolongation

Drawing on the macro- as well as the microtheoretical foundations outlined during this paper – what could be appropriate social factors or *theoretical constructs* helping to explain prolongation of family institutionalization processes? To answer this question I will analytically discriminate between normative and socioeconomic factors; with the former ones referring to actors' perceptions about what makes family life a good, that is: *subjectively desirable* family constellation in the context of increasingly insecure labor markets and the latter ones referring to economic, educational or occupational resources of an actor or a private household such as monthly income, level of education, social prestige or professional socialization providing actors with experience with several types of occupational arrangements – i.e., fixed-term contracts, part-time work, unemployment or permanent employment.

During actors' life courses both dimensions are interconnected with each other. Thus, for example, professional socialization shapes actors' attitudes towards their occupational as well as family-life planning. Vice versa, it is reasonable to assume that perceived occupational insecurities as well as subjective precarity of family planning exert influence on educational and occupational decisions. To focus family institutionalization processes during this study the latter will be excluded in the later empirical analyses of this paper, although it would be interesting to investigate in effects of – relatively – time-invariant socio-psychological attitudes on career decisions.

Instead, some detailed remarks on both types of determinants are in order. Being founded on the analytical premises of methodological individualism it is appropriate to conceive norms guiding actors' decisions to institutionalize their partnerships as being rooted in collective value systems (Coleman 1990: 132f.) rather than being free-floating, idiosyncratic entities. Adding to that, in times of economic, cultural and technological globalization, there is an increasing tendency towards actors' socialization processes being interpenetrated by a plurality of life-forms and value systems (Münch 1987: 66f.). In various instances – families, friends and neighborhoods, in kindergarten as well as in school, at the working place, during leisure-time activities etc. – actors become subjected to lifestyles, values and cultural expressions that, to a more or less great extent, differ from their already learned cultural expectations and identities (Coleman 1990: 157-160). As social closure effects have been empirically observed among educational or occupational groups as well as peer-groups for a long time (Bourdieu 2010) it is quite obvious that not everyone might become a cosmopolitan in the sense theorists of individualization sometimes postulate (Beck 2008).

Being confronted with these varieties of cultural norms, values and life-styles during their life-courses, actors are challenged to re-actualize and to re-rationalize their prospects and attitudes towards their future occupational careers and family-lives from time to time. Decisions to institutionalize family life – such as building or buying a home, giving birth to a (first) child or marrying – are thus shaped to a certain extend by these re-actualization processes with both partners contributing their personal views on family life as well as their socioeconomic resources. By providing each other with these immaterial as well as material

goods in the context of a shared *definition of the social situation* (Esser 1996, 1998) both partners contribute to the stabilization of their partnership through an often time-consuming exchange process (Lewis/Spanier 1982). During these exchange processes then, time itself becomes a decisive factor shaping both partners' educational and occupational experiences, familial beliefs and desires and, thus, the foundations of their decision to institutionalize their relationship (Elster 1986a, 1989).

In the context of this study giving a short example is in order: Staying in a fixed term contract for a long time – say: for five years – might affect an actor's decisions on family institutionalization in another way than for someone who, for example, works under fixed term contracts only for a few months. After having strived to get into a permanent contract at the start of his occupational career as soon as possible the former actor – who once had believed that working under a fixed-term contract yields severe difficulties for family planning – might have learned to cope with uncertainty of his career planning due to having get used to his precarious occupational situation. Furthermore, working in a field of high social prestige, being on a high level of education or earning wages above the average might facilitate coping with the otherwise objectively precarious situation (Mills/Blossfeld 2005: 9ff.). Hence, the first actor can be expected to transit relatively fast to parenthood or to owning a house. On the other hand, the latter actor's precarious attitudes towards his career planning might stay unaffected by the short span of time he works in under a fixed term contract as he is able to change into a permanent contract only after a short period of time. Thus, he never learned to cope with this challenging situation and, consequently, sticks to his belief that working under a fixed-term contract affects family institutionalization processes in a negative way, i.e. complicates budget planning or leads to feelings of social exclusion.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, this example demonstrates the analytical importance of socioeconomic determinants of prolongation of partnership institutionalization processes. As already mentioned, high levels of education, above average earnings and higher social status or occupational prestige can be expected to reduce perceptions of precarity when working under a fixed-term contract. Nevertheless, expected effects of levels of education on

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<sup>10</sup> This assumption which basically refers to Allport's (1979 [1954]) contact hypothesis is in conflict with the theory of neo-capitalist landgrab (see section 3.1) only at first glance. As Dörre and his colleagues (2012, 2013) showed in an illuminating qualitative study, actors working under insecure labor market conditions and being subjects to social welfare due to long lasting unemployment very often report feelings of discrimination receiving these transfers. Although these measures (i.e., unemployment aid, occupational retraining, "one-euro jobs") strive at helping socially excluded actors to overcome their insecure occupational situation, actors often perceive them as "performance tests" (Dörre) based on far stricter eligibility criteria than those (informally) valid for actors who work under fixed-term or even permanent contracts. These politically inducted mechanisms of increasing precarity which, in fact, are disciplinary mechanism could be at work among socioeconomically better situated population groups either. Those actors for example who regard fixed term contracts as stepping stones towards permanent employment and who fail to succeed when competing for a permanent contract might become socialized to perceive this disciplining mechanism allowing for social upward mobility *the longer they actually work under fixed term contracts*. As the inventory used for this study neither does contain any items on subjective perception of labor market disciplining nor attitudes to fixed-term contracts measured at the start of interviewees' occupational biographies empirical analyses of this issue, at least in this context, could not be realized.

partnership institutionalization processes have to be considered cautiously in the context of recent empirical findings indicating that education plays, at least to a certain degree, an ambiguous role. While there are no significant effects of education on prolongation till birth of the first child among men, there is empirical evidence that women on high levels of education postpone motherhood due to time-consuming acquirement of human-capital (Becker 1973, Bertram et al. 2011, Kreyenfeld 2010).

From a life-course perspective young adults at the start of their employment careers usually lack occupational and general life experience which means that they are more volatile to job and labor market insecurity than older adults (Mills/Blossfeld 2005: 6). Thus, it can be expected that age has a negative effect on time till birth of the first child: the younger the interviews the longer the decision to give birth to the first child is prolonged. Adding to this expectation and based on the investment model of partnership institutionalization (see section 3.2) it is reasonable to assume that this effect might increase when controlling for levels of education and sex: The younger the participants and the higher the level of education the longer transition to parenthood – particularly among women – takes.

### 3.6 Institutionalization as a sequence of high-cost decisions

In a broader action theoretical sense (Coleman 1990) processes of institutionalization of partnerships can be understood as sequences of empirically measurable family events during partnership life-courses that are the resultant of individual high-cost decisions leading to the stabilization of partnerships (McGinnis 2003, Mensch 2000, Rusbult et al. 1998). From this perspective a partnership can be conceived as being (relatively) stable the higher the – material as well as immaterial – costs of disbanding the relationship. Thus, the term *high-cost decision* is connoted events that occur during later stages of partnership institutionalization processes while low-cost decisions occur during earlier phases. Examples for the latter type of decisions could be the introduction of one's partner to his or her parents or the decision to deposit properties in each other's flat.<sup>11</sup> Real estate purchase, transition to parenthood or marriage are, from the perspective of empirical family sociology, classical resultants of high-cost decisions (King/Christensen 1983, Kopp et al. 2010: 43-54). Based on these theoretical considerations the following partnership events will be ideal-typically considered being resultants of high-cost decisions that positively affect institutionalization of partnerships during this study: first joint vacation, cohabitation, establishing a kitty, establishing a private deposit, real estate purchase, transition to parenthood and marriage.

Regarding the selection of these ideal-types of institutionalization events a few critical remarks are in order. First of all, it seems quite reasonable to assume that in certain cases

<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of the theory of high-cost decisions it seems reasonable to conceive of sexual intercourse or partners saying *I love you* to each other relying on low-cost decisions because both events occur early during partnership life-courses (Kopp et al. 2010: 43-54). This would be too premature a conclusion because both of the aforementioned events are emotionally charged to a large extent. Although theory of high-cost decisions in particular and rational choice theory in general are not incompatible with theories of emotions and affects (Elster 2007, Hill 1992) both of the aforementioned events should be implemented cautiously into an empirical model of (sequential) institutionalization processes based on the rationale of high-cost decisions.



birth of the first child is not fully dependent on both partners' conscious decisions because pregnancy could have happened as an unintended consequence of sexual intercourse. Thus, I will stick to the term *transition to parenthood* during this study to indicate that, even when pregnancy had happened unintentionally, (the prospect of) becoming a mother or father is – usually – accompanied by raising consciousness among both partners that they soon will be parents. In this special case the decision to transition to parenthood is a downstream one and it is obvious that these special cases of unwanted pregnancy and, thus, unwanted parenthood cannot be empirically distinguished from cases of intended pregnancy and transition to parenthood – at least when methodically relying on retrospective data gathering rather than panel designs (see section 5.1).

Furthermore it is theoretically important a question whether all of the aforementioned types of partnership events can be assumed to be relying on individual high-cost decisions to exactly the same extent. Common sense would suggest that – material as well as immaterial – investments in spending holiday time together for the first time are considerably lower than those necessary for purchasing a real estate or marrying, i.e. It should not be far to seek for a differentiation of high cost decisions into three subtypes: *low high-cost decision*, *intermediate high-cost decisions* and *high high-cost decisions*. Thus, the aforementioned ideal-typical partnership events will be ordered along this differentiation, based on the assumption that partnerships will be more stable the higher the expected material as well immaterial opportunity costs for dissolving a partnership are:

(1) *Low high-cost decision for institutionalization:*

First joint vacation

(2) *Intermediate high-cost decisions:*

Cohabitation

Establishing a kitty

Establishing a private deposit

(3) *High high cost decisions:*

Real estate purchase

Transition to parenthood

Marriage

In the later course of this study this ordering will be empirically tested by conducting descriptive event history analyses (see section 5.4.1). Later on, descriptive as well as multivariate analyses will be conducted in order to test for the following research hypotheses based on the outlined theoretical assumptions.

#### 4. Research hypotheses

Based on the previous considerations it is assumed that young couples postpone costly decisions to stabilize their partnership if they live under objectively precarious conditions like fixed-term-contract *and* perceive their situation as being a threat to their life-plans. To facilitate comparisons between low high-cost, intermediate high-cost and high high cost decisions, partnership institutionalization decisions will be ranked along their theoretically

assumed material and immaterial expenditure. Using time till realization of the aforementioned subtypes of institutionalization decisions as dependent variables, the following hypotheses will guide later empirical analyses:

(1) *Objective precarity:*

The higher the ratio of fixed-term-contracts (FTC) during occupational biographies, the longer the realization of high and intermediate high-cost decisions to institutionalize a partnership is prolonged in comparison to low high-cost decisions.

(2) *Subjective precarity:*

The stronger the perceived threat to life-plans resulting from FTC, the longer the realization of high and intermediate high-cost decisions to institutionalize a partnership is prolonged in comparison to low high-cost decisions.

To control for pluralization of life-forms as a competing social context influence on the micro-societal level effects of gender role attitudes on time till realization of family institutionalization will be tested based on the following hypothesis:

(3) *Gender role attitudes*

The more egalitarian the gender role attitudes of an actor the longer time it takes till realization of *high* and *intermediate* high-cost decisions and the shorter the time till realization of *low* high-cost decisions.

Finally socio-structural variables for participants' sex and levels of education will be included in the analyses. No further hypotheses will be formulated as both of these items merely serve as control variables although it would be reasonable to assume level of education exerting a positive effect of time till realization of institutionalization decisions, especially transition to childhood (Becker 1981, Kreyenfeld et al. 2012).

## **5. Empirical results**

After giving an overview over sample statistics as well as approaches to operationalization of objective and subjective precarity, event history analyses will be conducted by calculating Kaplan-Meier estimates ("product limit estimates") for each of the aforementioned variables measuring time till realization of a institutionalization decision (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 72-76). Although these estimates do not allow controlling for confounding variables directly they are a useful approach to shed light on some basic statistical associations between predictors and time-dependent variables. Thus detailed multivariate analyses based on approaches sensitive to time-dependent covariates will be conducted in future studies.

### **5.1 Data**

Empirical analyses throughout this study rely on a random sample consisting of 1,083 adults in an age-range of twenty to thirty-five years, all of them living in a private partnership and working either under a fixed term-contract or under a permanent contract at the time the interviews were collected (November 2012 till March 2013). Of these, 471 participants reported that the birth to at least one child had already taken place before the interviews were conducted; 612 participants were childless. Answering the interviews' entrance question, 543 participants reported that they had worked at least once under a fixed-term

contract during their occupational biography while the other 540 said that they had worked under a permanent contract most of the time, but never under a fixed-term contract.<sup>12</sup> These data were used to separate the sample into a treatment group consisting of actors who experienced working under a fixed-term contract at least once during their occupational biographies and a control group comprised of subjects who worked under a permanent contract most of the time. However, when it came to the retrospective interviews dealing with interviewees' occupational biographies, only 532 actors reported that they had worked under a fixed-term contrast at least once during their occupational biographies while 551 reported having worked under a permanent contract most of the time. Hence, these corrected numbers will found the basis for later descriptive analyses (see section 4.2).

Among the 1,083 participants there are 466 males and 617 were females. Furthermore, selection bias throughout the sampling process caused overrepresentation of highly-educated persons (see table 1). Besides a possible tendency towards self-selective interviewee behavior particularly among unskilled workers, the lack of participants reporting no schooling at all can be explained by the fact that very often unemployment is negatively correlated to educational level (Lohmann 2010). Thus, as unemployed persons were excluded from the sampling process, incidence rates for these populations turned out to be relatively low.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1: Participants' educational levels**

|  | n    | Perc. |
|--|------|-------|
| A-levels/university of applied sciences entrance qualification | 685  | 63.2  |
| Middle school  | 330  | 30.4  |
| Lower secondary school   | 66   | 6.1   |
| No schooling / no answer                                       | 2    | 0.3   |
| Total  | 1083 | 100   |

Due to financial restrictions, conducting partner-interviews was not possible. These restrictions mainly arose from expectably low incidence rates when sampling for interviewees on the basis of both partners' data on current *and* previous employment situations as well as both partners' age. Although proxy-data regarding partners' age, socioeconomic and occupational situation were collected during the interviews the main focus of this study lies on measuring the effects of objective and subjective precarity on the stabilization processes of partnerships from the perspective of one of the partners. To test for relational effects, future studies, indeed, should investigate impacts of partners' socio-

<sup>12</sup> "Most of the time" means that episodes of additional job-training, parental leave or unemployment could occur during participants' trajectories.

<sup>13</sup> Assuming that individual calculus towards family formation and institutionalization under conditions of unemployment severely differ from those under conditions of fixed-term employment it was – after long-lasting discussions as well as detailed literature-reviews – decided to exclude unemployed persons from our analyses.

structure as well as attitudes towards precarious work on institutionalization-processes of partnerships and families.

## 5.2 Measuring objective precarity and subjective precarity

For this study objective precarity is operationalized as the relative weight of fixed term contracts among occupational biographies of young adults in Germany measured in months. Thus, event history data was collected beginning one year before interviewees' current relationships' starting points. The reason for this methodical prerequisite lies in testing for effects of former educational and occupational episodes on partnership institutionalization processes. Two different categorizations were used in order to control for effects of construction of contingent indices (Besozzi/Zehnpfennig 1976): The first one differentiates between actors having no experience with working under fixed-term contracts at all, actors with low or intermediate shares of experience and those with intermediate and high levels of experience. The second one differentiates between actors having any or little experience with fixed-term contracts, actors with intermediate amounts of experience and those with high shares of experience with working under fixed-term contracts (see table 2).

**Table 2: Shares of time spent working under fixed-term contracts during occupational biographies**

|                 | Shares of time under FTC (Categorization I) |              |              |               | Shares of time under FTC (Categorization II) |              |             |               |
|-----------------|---|--------------|--------------|---------------|--|--------------|-------------|---------------|
|                 | 0%  | 1-49%.       | 50-100%      | Total         | 0-19%  | 20-69%.      | 70-100%     | Total         |
| Males           | 261<br>(56%)                                | 105<br>(23%) | 100<br>(21%) | 466<br>(100%) | 311<br>(67%)                                 | 84<br>(18%)  | 71<br>(15%) | 466<br>(100%) |
| Females         | 290<br>(47%)                                | 181<br>(29%) | 146<br>(24%) | 617<br>(100%) | 369<br>(60%)                                 | 156<br>(25%) | 92<br>(15%) | 613<br>(100%) |
| Total           | 551   | 286          | 246          | 1083          | 680  | 240          | 163         | 1083          |
| Tests of assoc. | Chi <sup>2</sup>                            | 9.4540**     | CramerV      | .0934**       | Chi <sup>2</sup>                             | 8.3616*      | CramerV     | .0879*        |
| Educ. high      | 339<br>(49%)                                | 204<br>(30%) | 142<br>(21%) | 685<br>(100%) | 424<br>(62%)                                 | 170<br>(25%) | 91<br>(13%) | 685<br>(100%) |
| Educ. low       | 211<br>(53%)                                | 82<br>(21%)  | 104<br>(26%) | 397<br>(100%) | 255<br>(64%)                                 | 70<br>(18%)  | 72<br>(18%) | 397<br>(100%) |
| Total           | 550   | 286          | 246          | 1082          | 679  | 240          | 163         | 1082          |
| Tests of assoc. | Chi <sup>2</sup>                            | 11.8850**    | CramerV      | .1048**       | Chi <sup>2</sup>                             | 9.9948**     | CramerV     | .0961**       |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts; educ. high = A-levels and university of applied sciences entrance qualification; Educ. low = Middle schools, lower secondary school and no schooling; row percentages in parentheses.

To a great extent the somewhat arbitrary character of these categorizations is the result of a still low amount of theoretical knowledge as well as empirical evidence concerning the interplay between time spent working under fixed-term contracts on the one hand and actors' rationalizing their (planned) behavior on the other hand (Ajzen/Klobas 2013). Thus, a few methodical considerations might be in order. The two categorizations rest on the main methodological assumption that drawing a sharp dividing line between *having no biographical experience with fixed-term contracts at all* and *having a little experience* a priori is impossible when it comes to finding a suitable, that is an empirically testable hypothesis on why actors act the way they do in the context of certain labor market conditions (Ragin 2000), especially when dealing with issues concerning processes of family institutionalization. It could be a

methodically fruitful way to build statistical models based on metric scales such as *time (measured in months) spent working under fixed-term contracts* or *shares of time spent working under fixed-term contracts* exclusively. But this would be too easy a way out from an empirical as well as theoretical point of view because it would not solve the problem of finding an empirically guided consent on what it actually means for social actors when they talk of high or low amounts of experience with working under fixed-term contracts.

Thus, I will settle for analyzing the extreme cases by providing the aforementioned categorizations: The first one particularly focuses the extreme cases of those actors who reported that they *never worked under fixed-term contracts* during their empirically collected biographies while the second categorization sheds light on those who worked under fixed-term contracts most of the time. Due to low sub-sample size – only 79 persons reported that they spent 100 percent of their occupational biographies working under fixed-term contracts – it was avoided to construct the extreme group as consisting only of those actors who reported that they worked under fixed-term contracts exclusively.

In order to maintain differentiation between treatment and control group only row sums and percentages are reported during the following descriptive analyses. Looking at the contingency table in the upper left corner of table 2 we see that more than half of the young men have never worked under fixed term contracts during the collected occupational biographies. The share of women who reported that they never worked under fixed-term contracts lies slightly below 50 percent. Tests of association indicate differences between the subgroups to be highly significant although Cramer's  $V$  turns out to be very low. Based on the second categorization (upper right contingency table) percentage differences become more evident, although Cramer's  $V$  turns out to stay at a comparatively low level. Furthermore, analysis based on the second categorization shows that the amount of men who reported high shares of time worked under fixed-term contracts (70 to 100 percent) equals that of women who reported the same extent.

Considering levels of education based on the first categorization (lower right contingency table), actors with high educational levels divide into two subgroups of nearly the same size – those having no experience with fixed-term contracts at all and those with low to high amounts of experience. The share of highly educated actors among those who reported that they have little experience with working under fixed-term contracts increases when taking the second categorization as a basis. When one looks at the group of actors with (comparatively) low levels of education, bivariate analyses yield nearly the same results as for the highly educated actors. Tests of associations lead to significant values for  $\chi^2$  while Cramer's  $V$  turns out to be on a low level indicating a poor association among subgroups in both analyses.

### **5.3 Measuring subjective precarity**

Besides operationalizing and analyzing objective precarity a scale measuring subjective precarity was constructed during early stages of the research project (Baron et al. 2013). Inspired by an already existing inventory measuring perceived precarity of private living

and working conditions of illegal immigrants in the United States (Goldring/Landolt 2011) this instrument consists of items measuring actors' views on the compatibility of fixed-term contracts with issues of planning of private life in general and family formation in particular.<sup>14</sup> Looking at descriptive item as well as scale statistics in table 3, a fairly high proportion of participants reported being insecure when confronted with planning family-life under the condition of fixed-term contracts. Only the mean for the fourth item ("As long as you are working under a fixed-term contract family-planning is illusinary.") turned out to lie near to the median of the five-item scale.

Assuming that processes of occupational and societal precarization could turn out to be empirical artifacts of a general trend towards modernization and *pluralization of life-forms* (Beck/Beck-Gernsheim 1990), a scale measuring gender role attitude will be included in the later analyses (ISSP-Research-Group 2013, Mason Oppenheim et al. 1976). Based on a five-dimensional scale ranging from strong traditionalism to strong egalitarianism, descriptive statistics are shown below (see table 3). Here, means of the associated items as well as the scale show actors in our sample to hold quite egalitarian views on gender role attitudes.

To test for both scales' construct validity confirmatory factor analyses based on the Kaiser-Guttman-Criterion were conducted (Harrington 2009). Adding to the inter-item-correlations, Cronbach's alphas are calculated to test for reliability of the newly developed subjective precarity scale.

Statistics measuring skew and kurtosis show values below the critical thresholds of 3.0 (for skew) and 10.0 (for kurtosis), indicating satisfactory normal distribution of all the items used throughout this study (Harrington 2009: 41f.). Confirmatory factor analysis reveals sufficiently high factor loadings for all hypothesized items, with items (7) and (11) being the only ones revealing factor loadings diverging slightly from a perfect ship. In the light of these results, the construct validity of both inventories is sufficiently high allowing for application during the empirical analyses in the later course of this study. With values above .700 in each case, reliability of all three scales is also high.

Furthermore, to keep Kaplan-Meier estimates interpretable (see next chapter) the original scales measuring subjective precarity and gender role attitudes on the basis of five manifestations will be reduced to three dimensions<sup>15</sup> in the course of this study.

<sup>14</sup> In this context, two already existing scales measuring occupational self-efficacy (Rigotti et al. 2008, Schyns/Collani 2002) and perceived job-security (Borg/Elizur 1992, Staufenberg/König 2011) were used as points of reference. Current social psychological studies (Bernardi et al. 2006, Domene 2012, Hirschi 2012, Lozza et al. 2013) show that both constructs exert significant effects on employees' work-life-balance when studied under flexible or (objectively) precarious working conditions such as unemployment, fixed term contracts or temporary work. To facilitate empirical comparison between persons having experienced fixed-term contracts and those who did not, questions were formulated to address *factual precariousness* in the former and *hypothetical precariousness* in the latter case. For detailed confirmatory analyses see Baron et. al. 2013.

<sup>15</sup> SPS: 1= strongly disagree and disagree, 2= neither disagree nor agree, 3= agree and strongly agree; GRA: 1 = strongly traditional and traditional, 2 = intermediate level, 3 = egalitarian and strongly egalitarian

**Table 3: Confirmatory Factor analyses and descriptive statistics: Subjective Precarity Scale (SPS) and Gender Role Attitudes (GRA)**

|   | Sample Statistics |      |        |          | Factor Loadings |       |
|---|-------------------|------|--------|----------|-----------------|-------|
|   | Mean              | SD   | Skew   | Kurtosis | SPS             | GRA   |
| (1) As long as you are working under a fixed-term contract, important decisions regarding private and family life cannot be taken.        | 3.76              | 1.27 | -.796  | -.436    | .786            |       |
| (2) Due to being employed under a fixed-term contract private budget-plans are heavily restricted.  | 3.92              | 1.13 | -.874  | -.063    | .799            |       |
| (3) Working under a fixed-term contract leads to a lower quality of life.   | 3.41              | 1.24 | -.374  | -.814    | .790            |       |
| (4) As long as you are working under a fixed-term contract family-planning is illusional.   | 2.56              | 1.36 | .356   | -1.068   | .653            |       |
| (5) People who live together for a long time ought to get married.  | 3.26              | 1.43 | -.221  | -1.254   |                 | .613  |
| (6) People who want children ought to get married.  | 2.95              | 1.46 | .121   | -1.232   |                 | .615  |
| (7) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.                | 4.48              | .915 | -1.976 | 3.574    |                 | .465  |
| (8) It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have a career one herself.                                       | 4.27              | .996 | -.993  | .911     |                 | .662  |
| (9) A preschool child is likely to suffer if his mother works.  | 3.60              | 1.32 | -.422  | -.768    |                 | .694  |
| (10) It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family. | 4.17              | 1.08 | -1.060 | .380     |                 | .795  |
| (11) All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.  | 3.27              | 1.28 | -.030  | -.784    |                 | .469  |
| n   |                   |      |        |          | 1075            | 1081  |
| Number of items   |                   |      |        |          | 4               | 7     |
| Cronbach's Alpha  |                   |      |        |          | .747            | .725  |
| Scale Mean  |                   |      |        |          | 3.42            | 3.71  |
| SD  |                   |      |        |          | .947            | .756  |
| Skew  |                   |      |        |          | -.393           | -.408 |
| Kurtosis  |                   |      |        |          | -.536           | -.191 |

Method of rotation: Varimax with Kaiser-criterion; Factor loadings lower than .200 omitted. Coding: SPS: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; GDA: 1 = strong traditionalism to 5 = strong egalitarianism

#### 5.4 Bivariate Analyses

During this chapter, Kaplan-Meier estimates, will be conducted to test for empirical validity of the general institutionalization model (see section 3.6) as well as of research hypotheses outlined during section 4. In a first step, transition times will be analyzed comparing each of the six partnership institutionalization models without considering any independent or

control variables. Later, detailed hypothesis tests will be conducted for each type of institutionalization process using bivariate models: Time till first joint vacation (low low cost decision), time till cohabitation, time till cohabitation and time till establishing a private deposit (intermediate high cost decisions), time till purchasing a real estate, time till birth of the first child in a partnership and time till marriage (high high cost decisions). These bivariate analyses will help to determine which of the indicators will be examined using multivariate analyses, especially Gompertz models, during section 5.5.<sup>16</sup>

#### 5.4.1 Testing the general institutionalization model

Table 4 shows average risktimes and transition rates for all the types of institutionalization events tested during this study. Except for the event *establishing a private deposit* the statistical model empirically validates the theoretically expected time sequence of institutionalization events. A reason for the event *establishing a private deposit* occurring relatively late during partnership institutionalization processes and thus falling into the subcategory of high high-cost decisions could be that the decision to save money for a (possible) real estate purchase coincides with the factual decision to purchase a real estate. It is reasonable, hence, to exclude the event *establishing a private deposit* from further hypothesis tests based on descriptive and multivariate statistics, because a bivariate analysis (not depicted here) revealed that only 213 of those subjects who established a private deposit have actually purchased a real estate.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics – institutionalization processes of partnerships**

|  | n<br>subjects | n<br>failures | Risktime | Risktime<br>(mean) | Transition<br>rate |
|--|---------------|---------------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Low high-cost decision</i>          |               |               |          |                    |                    |
| First joint vacation                   | 1083          | 895           | 30720    | 28.4               | .0291341           |
| <i>Intermediate high-cost decision</i> |               |               |          |                    |                    |
| Cohabitation                           | 1083          | 845           | 39908    | 36.8               | .0211737           |
| Establishing a kitty                   | 1083          | 578           | 62760    | 58.0               | .0092097           |
| <i>High high-cost decision</i>         |               |               |          |                    |                    |
| Marriage                               | 1039          | 554           | 68775    | 66.2               | .0080553           |
| Transition to parenthood               | 1083          | 471           | 78106    | 72.1               | .0060303           |
| Establishing a private deposit         | 1083          | 291           | 89566    | 82.7               | .003249            |
| Real estate purchase                   | 1083          | 285           | 93157    | 86.0               | .0030594           |

Risktime measured in months; transition rate =  $n_{failures} / risktime$

As a side note, descriptive analyses show that transition to parenthood occurs later in the life-courses of partnerships than marriage. This result is somewhat intriguing in the light of earlier descriptive analyses of gender-role attitudes which revealed that more actors in our

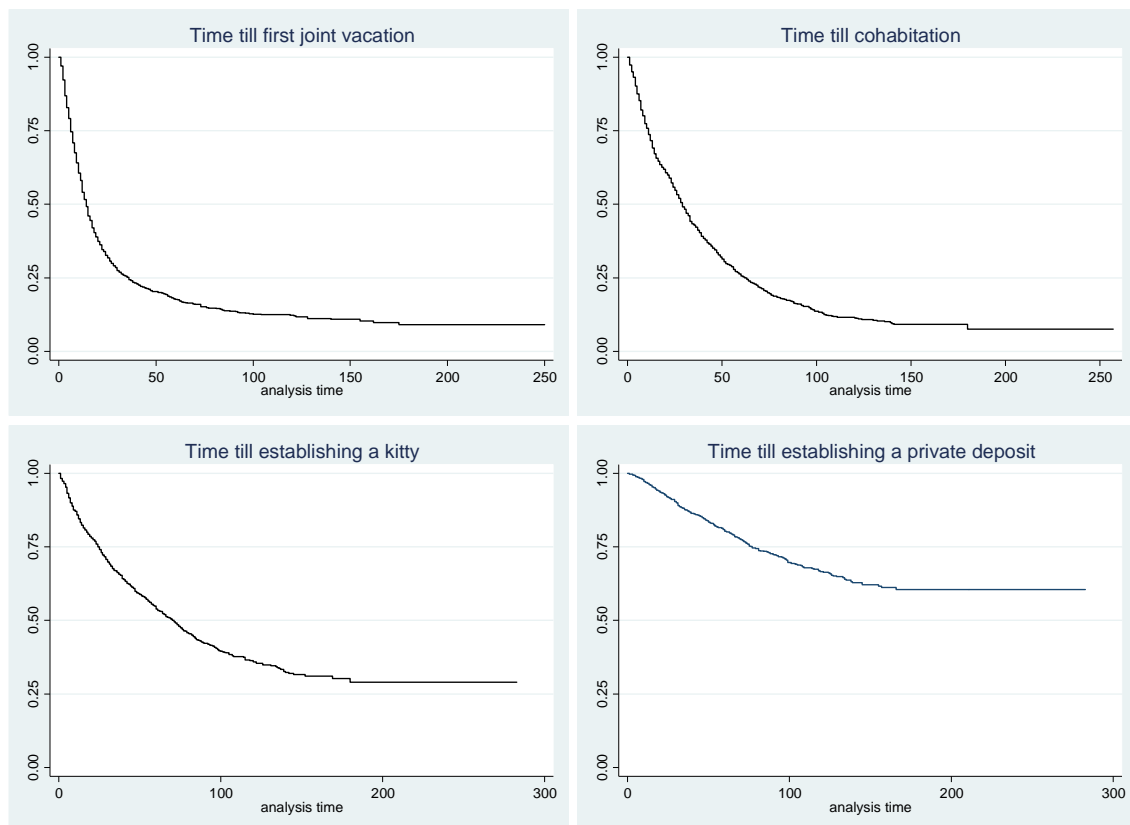
<sup>16</sup> Obviously most of the present theoretical constructs allow for usage of time-varying variables (Cleves et al. 2010). Sophisticated approaches such as piecewise constant models (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 116-127) will be realized during later phases of the underlying research project.

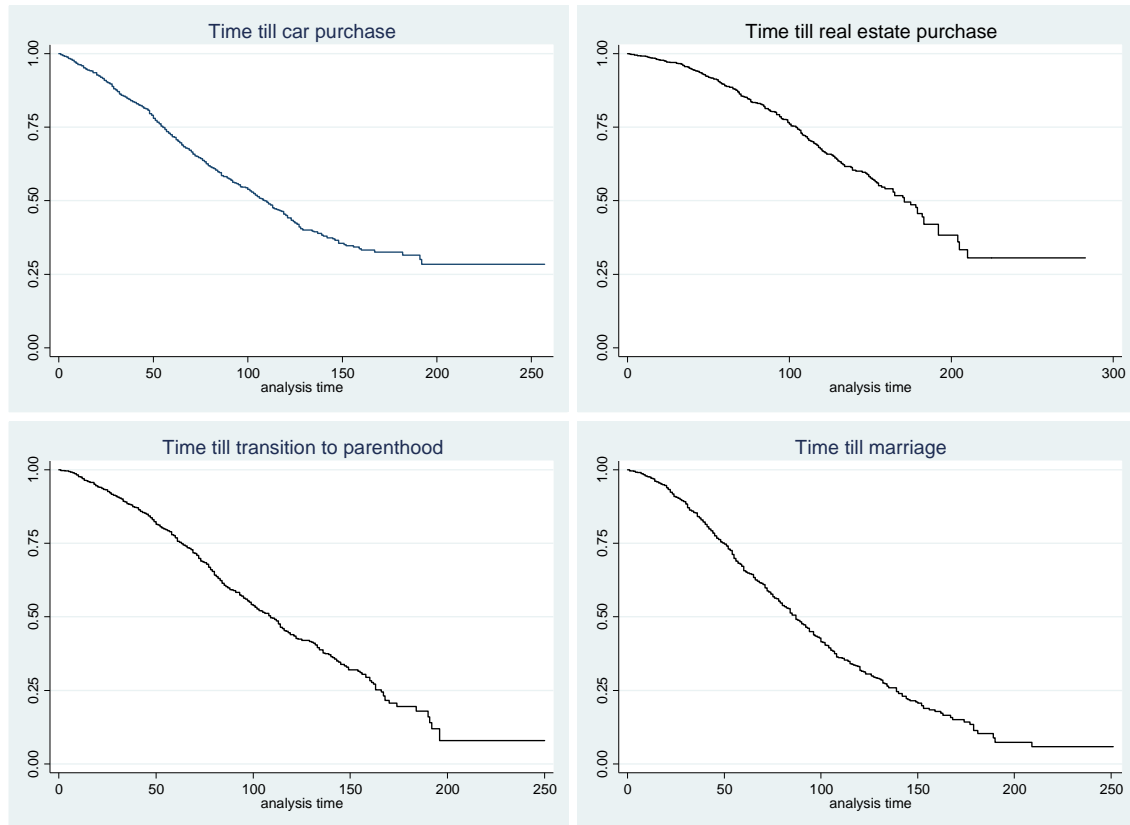


sample tended to decline than to accept the proposition that *people who want children ought to get married* (see section 5.3). Most intriguing, a gap between attitude and behavior seems to be at work here (Ajzen 1985).

All of the aforementioned descriptive statistics based on Kaplan Meyer estimates can be studied in graphically form (see below). Thus, slopes of the following survivor functions are larger the higher the accompanied transition rates are. The larger the distance between each function and its abscissa the lower the failure rate, that is: the rate of actors who reported that the particular event had occurred during the life-courses of their partnerships.

**Figure 1: Kaplan Meyer estimates – institutionalization processes of partnerships**





#### 5.4.2 Hypothesis test for low high-cost decision

To test for validity of the research hypotheses which were postulated in an earlier section (4), Wilcoxon tests of association were conducted. These measures allow testing for equality of survivor functions based on contingency tables and considering complete spans of times of each individual instead of certain points during partnerships' life-courses (Cleves et al. 2010: 122ff.). Furthermore, Wilcoxon tests focus differences between survivor functions early in actors' biographies (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 81) which is useful in a study problematizing family institutionalization processes.

The first independent variable – share of fixed-term contracts among actors' life-courses – was operationalized using two different categorizations (see section 5.2). Later on, during multivariate analyses, a continuous variable will be used instead of a categorical one (see section 5.5). Each table reporting results of tests of association will be accompanied by depictions of survivor functions in graphical form, because Wilcoxon tests do not provide any information on direction of effects.

**Table 5: Tests of association (Wilcoxon) – time till first joint vacation**

|                  | Share of FTC<br>(category. I) | Share of FTC<br>(category. II) | Subjective<br>Precarity | Gender role<br>attitudes | Sex   | Level of<br>Education |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| n events         | 895                           | 895                            | 889                     | 893                      | 895   | 895                   |
| Chi <sup>2</sup> | 1.95                          | 3.10                           | 8.24*                   | 11.07**                  | 1.09  | 8.47**                |
| p                | .3764                         | .2125                          | .0162                   | .0040                    | .2959 | .0036                 |

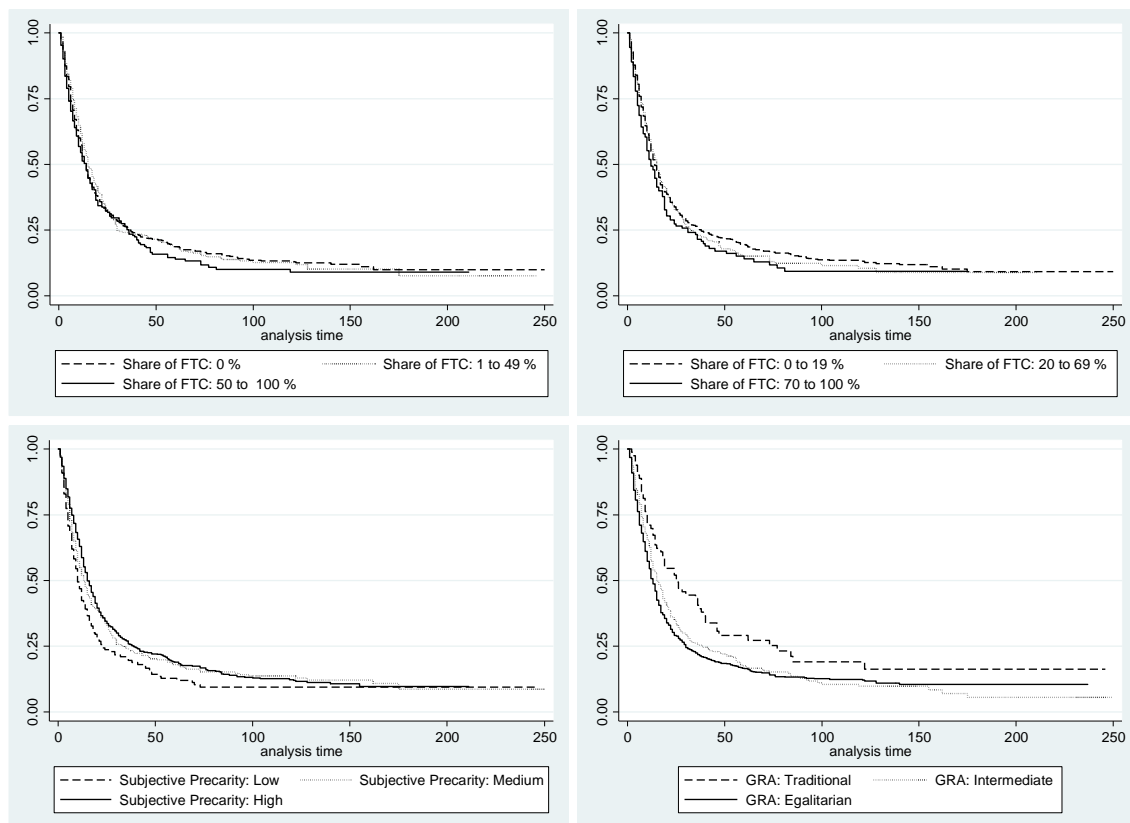
\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts

Results in table 5 indicate that the first hypothesis (objective precarity) has to be declined as, counterintuitive to our assumption, actors with high shares of fixed term contracts among their occupational biographies go on vacation with their partners earlier than those with low shares. However, this result is not on a statistically significant level.

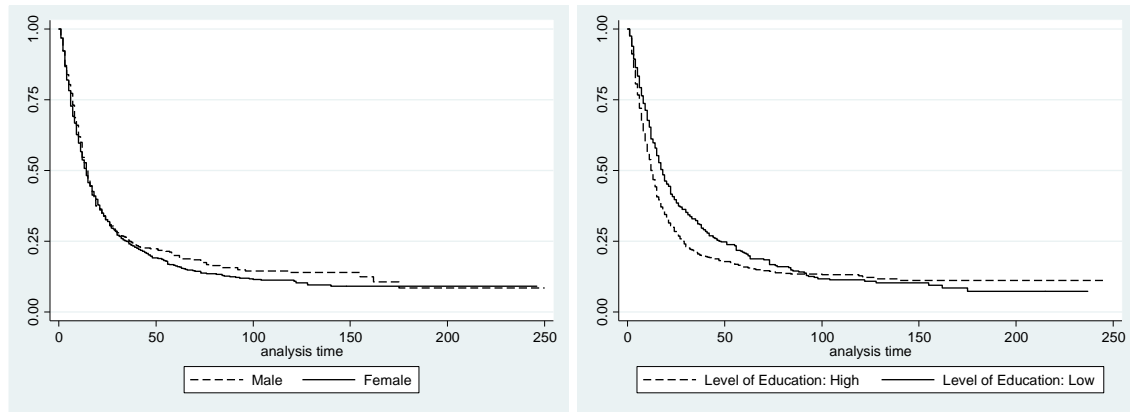
Looking at the results for the second hypothesis, subjective precarity exerts a significant positive effect on time till first joint vacation: Those actors who reported strong feelings of precarity go later on the first holiday with their current partner than those who reported low amounts of subjective precarity.

The third hypotheses, instead, can be accepted considering the fact that actors with egalitarian gender role attitudes go earlier on the first joint vacation than those with traditional views.<sup>17</sup> While there is no significant effect when controlling for sex, educational level significantly exerts a negative effect: Those with low levels of education postpone first joint vacation with their partner stronger than those on high levels of education. Whether this negative effect is correlated with differences in property relationships or, methodically more severe, with different definitions of vacation among participants could not be examined during these analyses and is open to future empirical investigations.

**Figure 2: Hypothesis test – time till first joint vacation**



<sup>17</sup> Here it was assumed that low high-cost decisions such as going on a first joined vacation will be postponed by actors with traditional gender role attitudes.



### 5.4.3 Hypothesis tests for intermediate high-cost decisions

#### *Cohabitation*

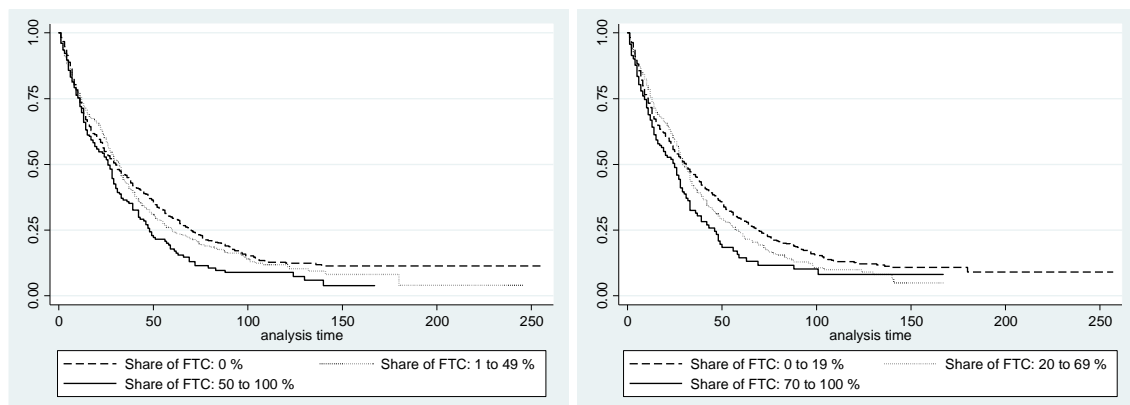
Again, the first hypothesis has to be declined as objective precarity now exerts a significant negative effect on time till cohabitation, the first indicator of realization of intermediate high-cost decisions. The second hypothesis (subjective precarity) as well as the third one (gender role attitudes) have to be declined, too. However, there is a significant negative effect of gender role attitudes: The more traditional actors' gender role attitudes the longer cohabitation with their partners is postponed. Moreover, sex and educational level do not exert any significant effects. All these results so far give reasons to assume that our earlier assumption based on the critical discussion of Dörre's theory of neocapitalist landgrab should be empirically investigated on in a much broader context in future studies: Those actors who show high amounts of – at least – objective precarity tend to institutionalize their partnership *in spite of* socioeconomic insecurity.

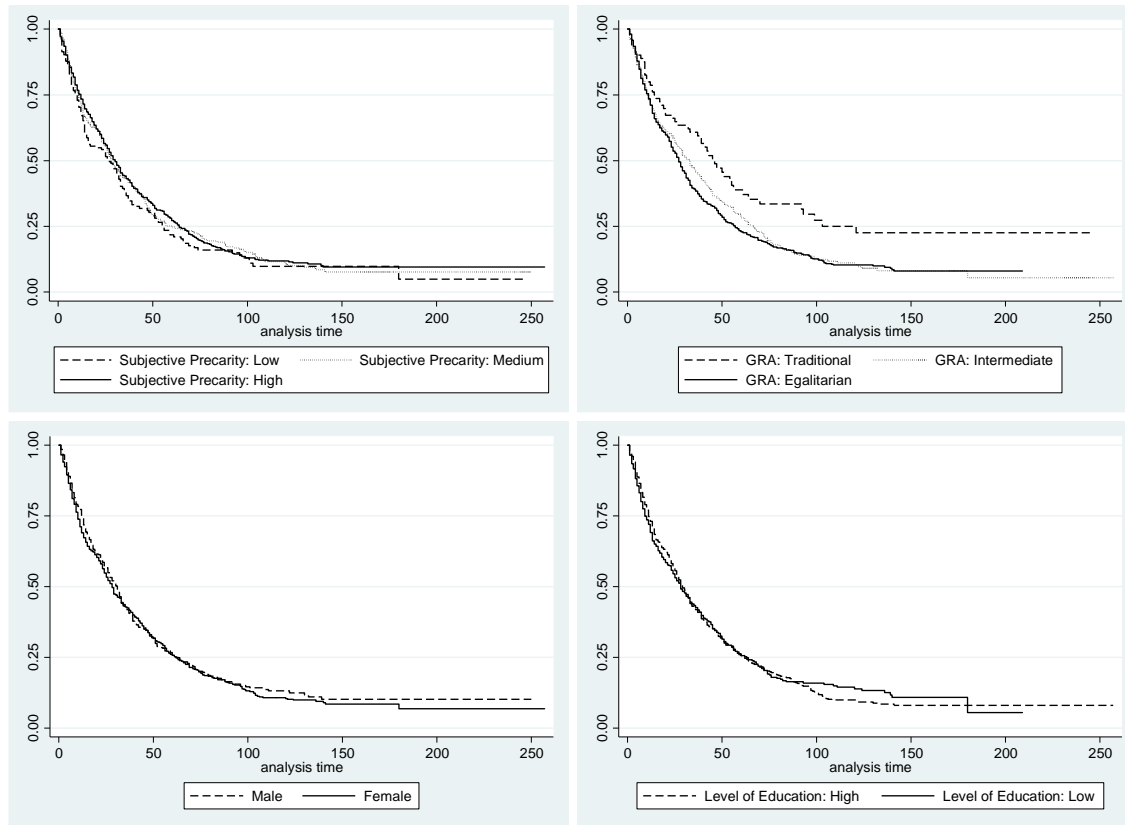
**Table 6: Tests of association (Wilcoxon) – time till cohabitation**

|                  | Share of FTC<br>(category. I) | Share of FTC<br>(category. II) | Subjective<br>Precarity | Gender role<br>attitudes | Sex   | Level of<br>Education |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| n events         | 845                           | 845                            | 840                     | 843                      | 845   | 845                   |
| Chi <sup>2</sup> | 8.44*                         | 9.28**                         | 1.65                    | 11.74**                  | .46   | .01*                  |
| p                | .0147*                        | .0096                          | .4383                   | .0028                    | .4972 | .0213                 |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts

**Figure 3: Hypothesis test – time till cohabitation**





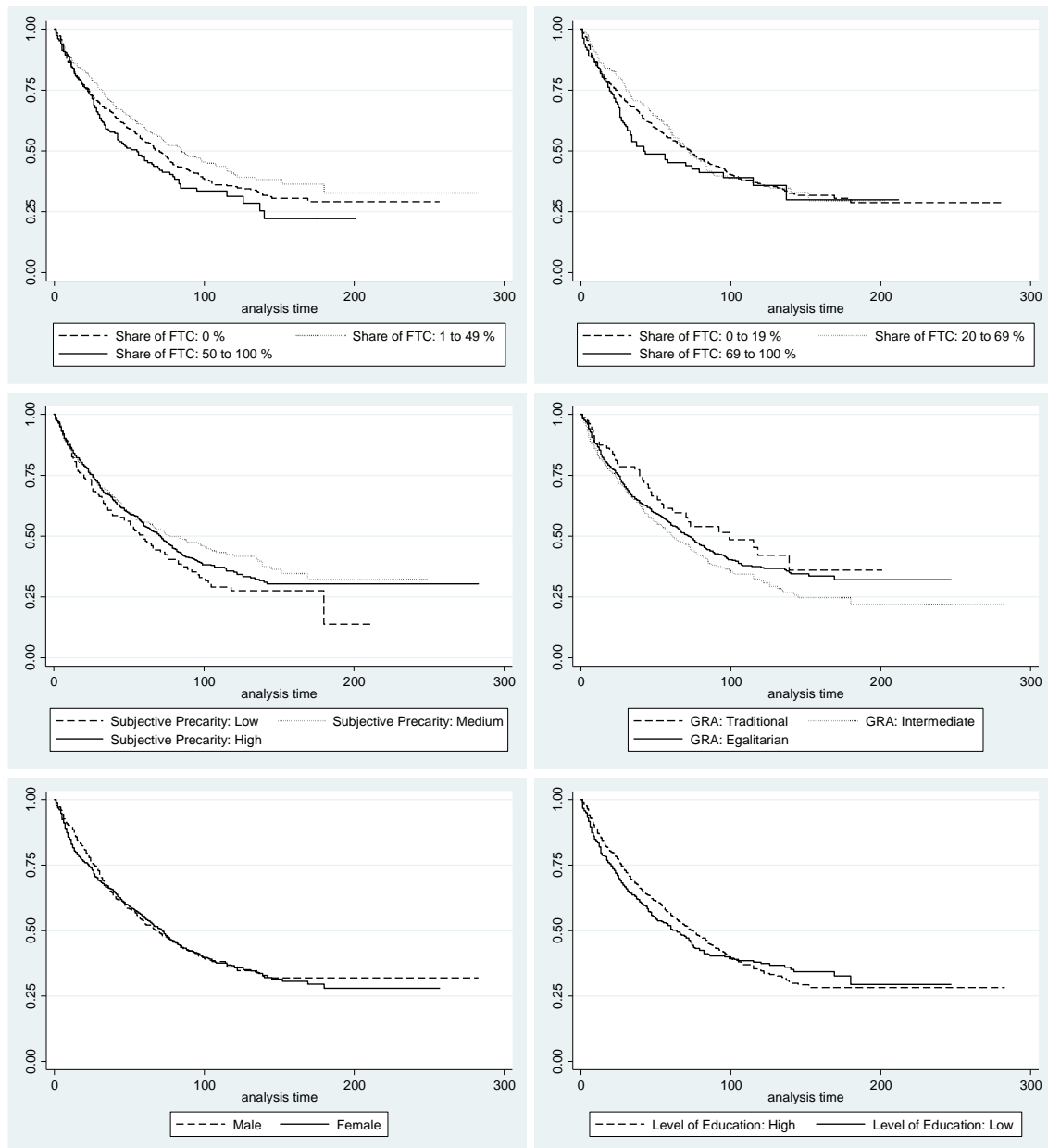
### *Establishing a kitty*

All of the dependent variables – except for objective precarity measured according to the first type of categorization – as well as control variables do not yield any significant effects when calculating transition rates for time till establishing a kitty. A reason for this could be that the decision to establish a kitty is just a subtype of decisions to be taken during the far more important process of sharing and building a home together, although earlier results showed that establishing kitty was reported to take place only after 58 months during partnership life-courses (see section 5.4.1). Considering these results and their unclear theoretical status the decision to divide expenses on day-to-day-need will be excluded from later multivariate analyses (see section 5.5).

**Table 7: Tests of association (Wilcoxon) – time till establishing a kitty**

|                  | Share of FTC<br>(category. I) | Share of FTC<br>(category. II) | Subjective<br>Precarity | Gender role<br>attitudes | Sex   | Level of<br>Education |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| n events         | 578                           | 578                            | 574                     | 577                      | 578   | 578                   |
| Chi <sup>2</sup> | 6.86*                         | 3.05                           | 4.02                    | 5.63                     | .14   | .64                   |
| p                | .0324                         | .2171                          | .1342                   | .0598                    | .7132 | .4245                 |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts

**Figure 4: Hypothesis test – time till establishing a kitty**

#### 5.4.4 Hypothesis tests for high high-cost decisions

##### *Marriage*

Next, hypotheses for high high-cost decisions will be empirically tested. Results of the first bivariate analyses show that time till marriage is significantly affected by shares of fixed-term contracts among actors' occupational biographies. But here the results are somewhat puzzling: According to the first model where the categorization of objective precarity is more rigid to actors without any experience with fixed-contracts, survivor functions for the latter group is widely similar to those of actors with high rates of fixed-term contracts. However, both groups marry earlier during their life-courses than those in the intermediate group. In the second model the differences between both groups' survivor functions are somewhat clearer although actors with low shares of fixed-term contracts whose partnerships last

longer than c. 150 months marry earlier than actors with low rates of fixed-term contracts in the same group. Regarding these ambivalent results the first hypothesis has to be declined again. Nevertheless, conducting multivariate analysis using continuous data for objective precarity is necessary (see section 5.5).

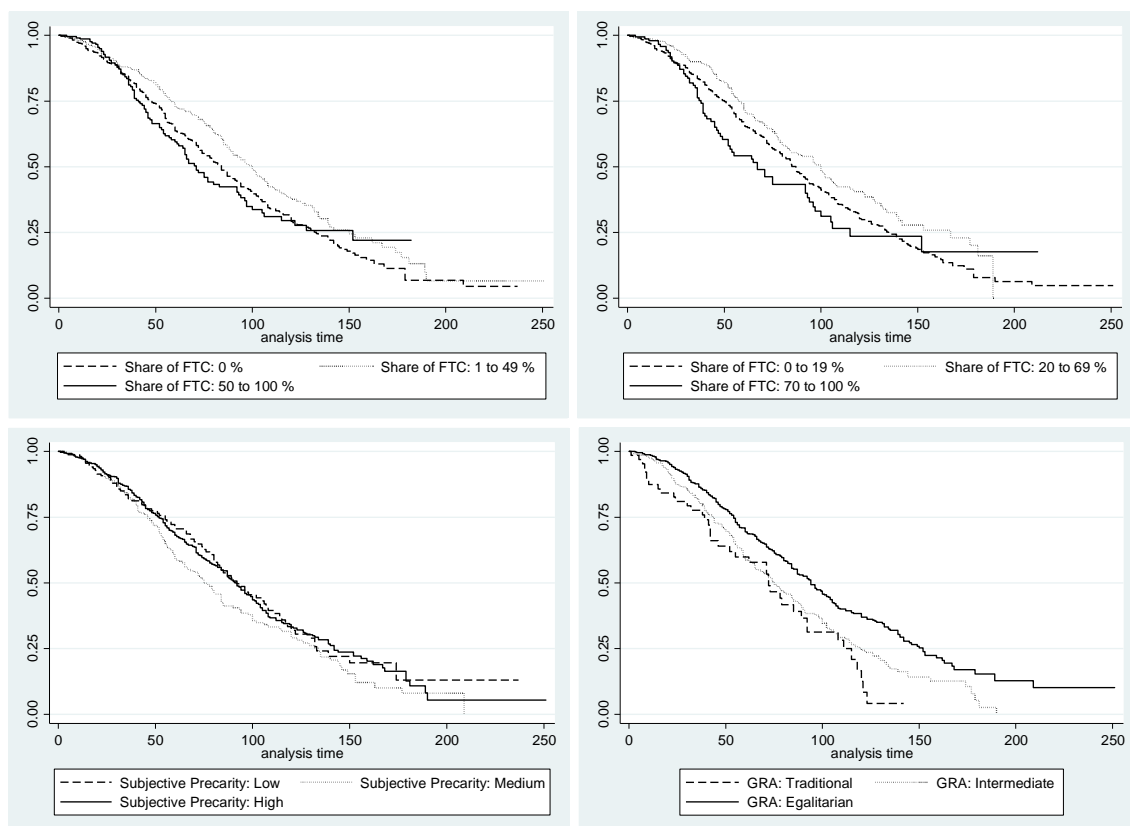
While subjective precarity does not show any significant effect, examining the impact of gender role attitudes yields results in accordance with our third hypothesis. Here, actors with traditional gender role attitudes marry earlier during their partnership life courses than those reporting egalitarian or partly egalitarian attitudes. Furthermore there is a significant positive effect of educational levels on time till marriage in accordance with economic theory of the family (Becker 1973, 1981). It will be interesting to see whether these effects holds true when controlling for several sociostructural and attitudinal variables in a multivariate model (see section 5.5).

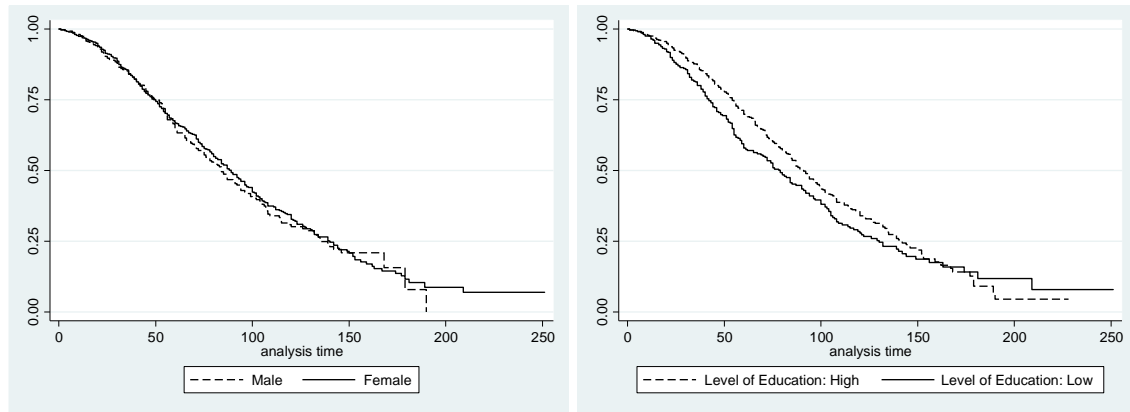
**Table 8: Tests of association (Wilcoxon) – time till marriage**

|                  | Share of FTC<br>(category. I) | Share of FTC<br>(category. II) | Subjective<br>Precarity | Gender role<br>attitudes | Sex   | Level of<br>Education |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| n events         | 554                           | 554                            | 550                     | 552                      | 554   | 554                   |
| Chi <sup>2</sup> | 6.80*                         | 9.68**                         | 5.26                    | 23.89***                 | .21   | 4.79*                 |
| p                | .0334                         | .0079                          | .0720                   | .0000                    | .6470 | .0287                 |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts

**Figure 5: Hypothesis test – time till marriage**





### *Transition to parenthood*

According to the first model transition takes significantly longer for actors' with high amounts of objective precarity than for all other groups although the former group's survivor function only marginally differs from the one for those actors reporting no objective precarity at all. Here again testing objective precarity's impact in a multivariate model based on a continuous variable is necessary. Next, subjective precarity exerts a positive effect on time till transition to parenthood, but looking at the statistics of the Wilcoxon tests reveals that this result is valid only for our sample. The same holds true gender role attitudes which means that the third hypothesis has to be declined as well.

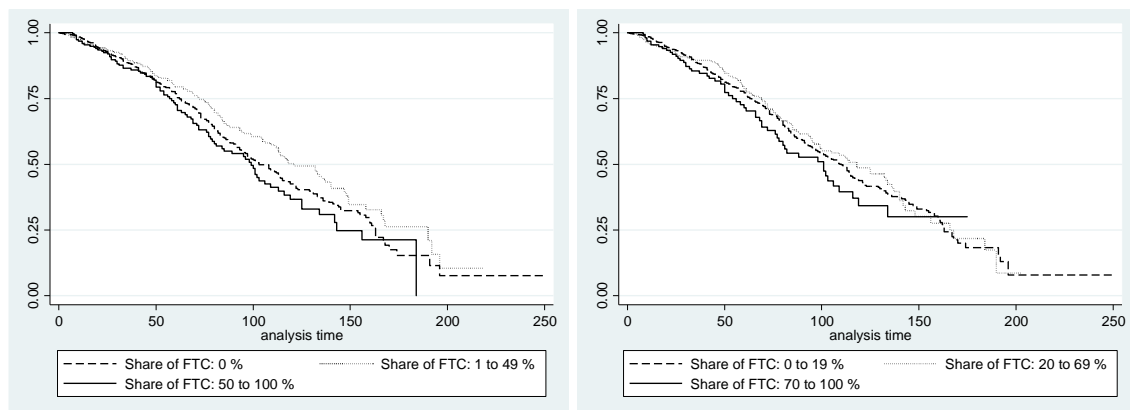
During the analysis of control variables educational level again exerts a significant positive effect on time till transition to parenthood while sex exerts no significant effect.

**Table 9: Tests of association (Wilcoxon) – time till transition to parenthood**

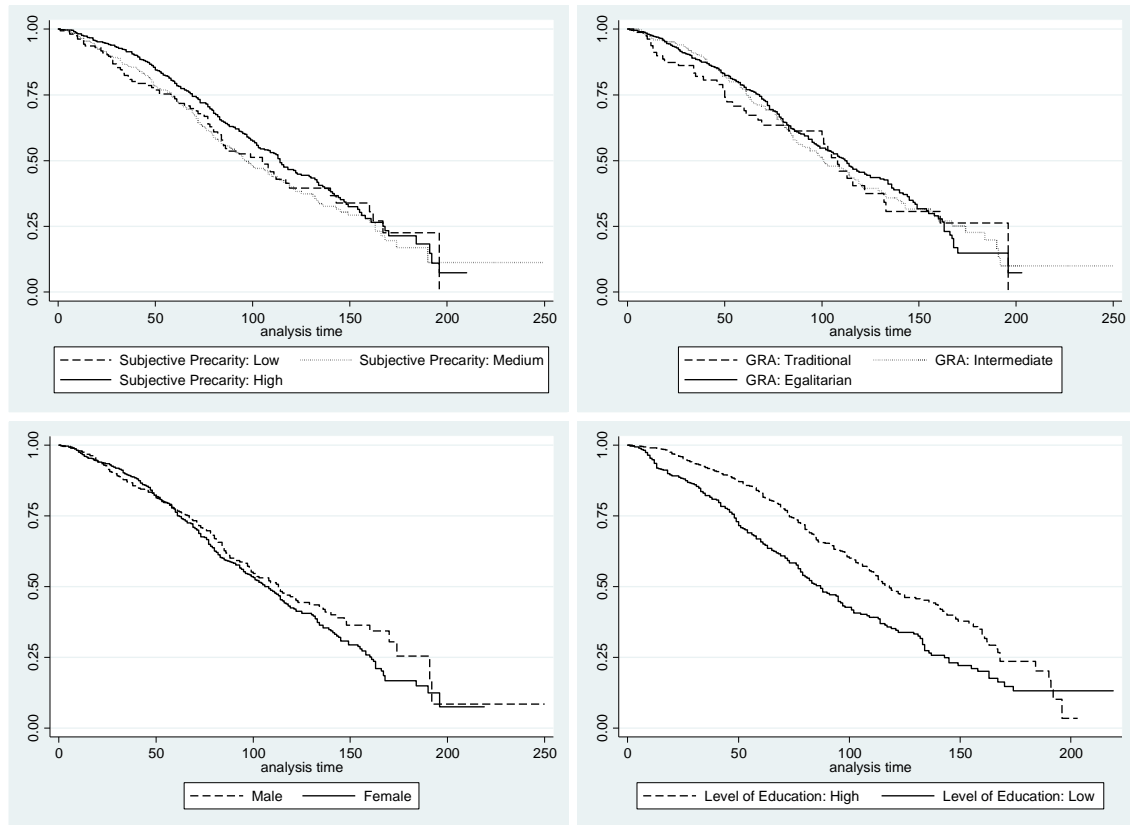
|                  | Share of FTC<br>(category. I) | Share of FTC<br>(category. II) | Subjective<br>Precarity | Gender role<br>attitudes | Sex   | Level of<br>Education |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| n events         | 471                           | 471                            | 467                     | 470                      | 471   | 471                   |
| Chi <sup>2</sup> | 6.88*                         | 2.40                           | 4.81                    | .44                      | 1.71  | 29.18***              |
| p                | .0321                         | .3017                          | .0903                   | .8015                    | .1912 | .0000                 |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts

**Figure 6: Hypothesis test – time till transition to parenthood**







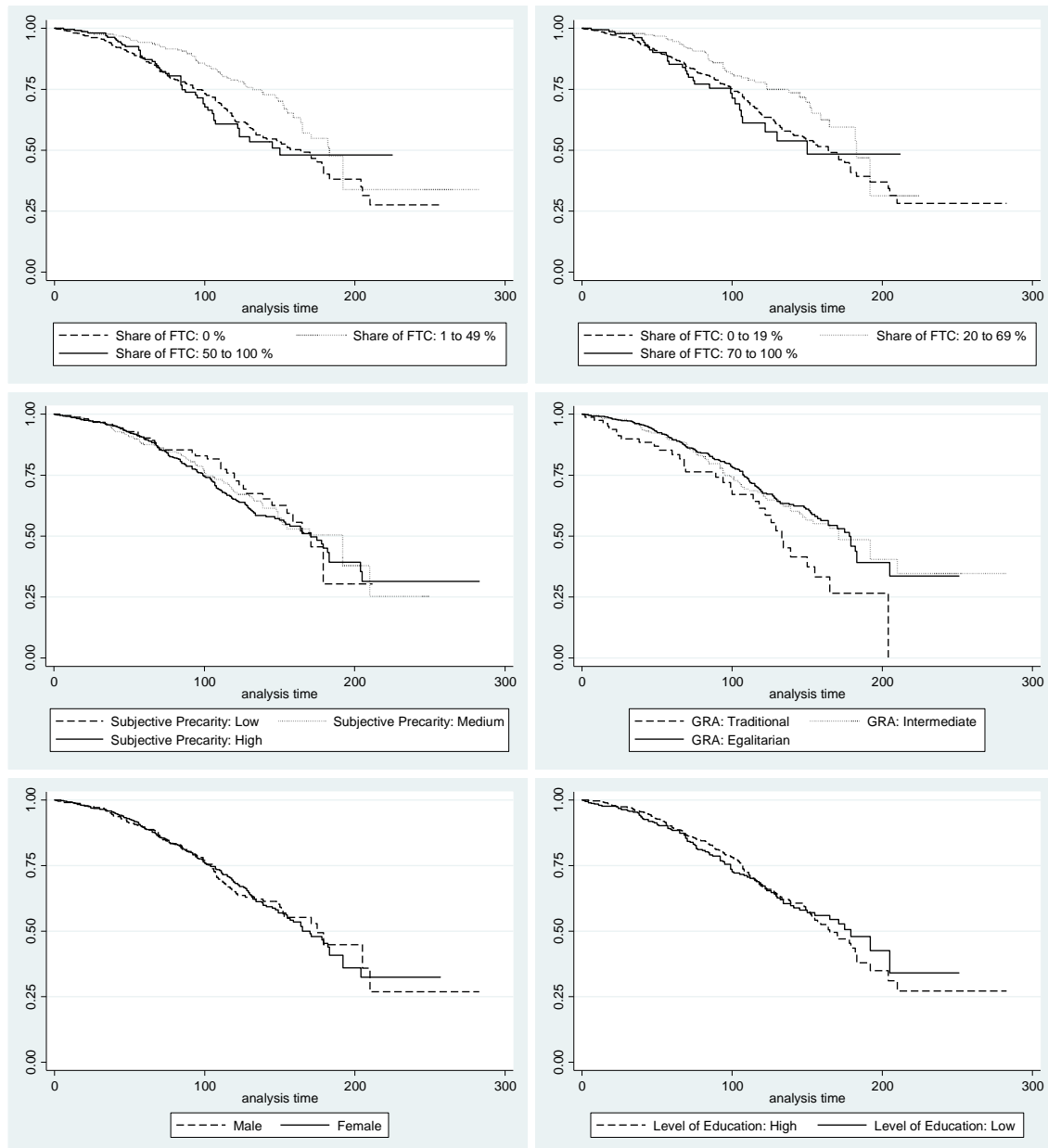
### *Real estate purchase*

Finally, results in table 10 and in figure 7 show subjects with high rates of objective precarity to prepone real estate purchase stronger than those with intermediate shares. Like before, survivor functions of actors with high rates of fixed-term contracts among occupational biographies do not differ much from survivor functions of actors reporting no objective precarity at all. Again, subjective precarity does not exert any significant effect while gender role attitudes – in accordance with the third research hypothesis – exert a significant positive effect on time till real estate purchase: Actors with egalitarian gender role attitudes postpone the purchase of a real estate to a greater extent than those with traditional attitudes.

**Table 10: Tests of association (Wilcoxon) – time till real estate purchase**

|                  | Share of FTC<br>(category. I) | Share of FTC<br>(category. II) | Subjective<br>Precarity | Gender role<br>attitudes | Sex   | Level of<br>Education |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| n events         | 285                           | 285                            | 283                     | 284                      | 285   | 285                   |
| Chi <sup>2</sup> | 12.94**                       | 9.69**                         | 1.00                    | 8.38*                    | .00   | .02                   |
| p                | .0015                         | .0079                          | .6053                   | .0152                    | .9612 | .8995                 |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; FTC = fixed-term contracts

**Figure 7: Hypothesis test – time till real estate purchase**

#### 5.4.5 Summary of bivariate hypothesis tests

Kaplan Meyer estimates conducted during the first part of this section (5.4.1) showed that the underlying data reproduced the theoretically assumed institutionalization model (see section 3.6) in most aspects. After excluding the events *establishing a private deposit* and *car purchase* from further examinations bivariate analyses were conducted to test for empirical validity of three hypotheses addressing the – expected – effects of objective precarity, subjective precarity and, as a competing contextual influencing factor, gender role attitudes. In table 11 the results of the hypothesis test for each sub-type of high-cost decision are reported:

During the bivariate analyses it became clear that actors with low rates of objective precarity postpone realization of low, intermediate and high high-cost decisions stronger than actors reporting high shares of fixed-term contracts. Adding to this result, postponement of realization of high high-cost decisions is the strongest among actors who

experience intermediate rates of fixed-term contracts during their occupational life-courses. Referring to Klaus Dörre's theory of neo-capitalist landgrab (see section 3.1) it is reasonable to – carefully – assume that those actors who experienced intermediate rates of fixed-term contracts during their occupational biographies are those who are mostly threatened by socioeconomic uncertainties when it comes to planning and realizing their partnership's institutionalization. However, it is mostly unclear how the results found so far are robust when examining the hypothesized relationships between objective and subjective precarity and partnership institutionalization processes based on multivariate models.

**Table 11: Results of bivariate hypothesis tests**

|                      | Hypothesis 1:<br>objective<br>precarity | Hypothesis 2:<br>subjective<br>precarity | Hypothesis 3:<br>gender role<br>attitudes | Control<br>variable:<br>sex | Control<br>variable:<br>education |
|----------------------|---|--|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Low HCD</i>       |   |  |   |                             |                                   |
| Vacation             | Declined                                | Accepted                                 | Accepted                                  | n.s.                        | Signif. (-)                       |
| <i>Intermed. HCD</i> |   |  |   |                             |                                   |
| Cohabitation         | Declined                                | Declined                                 | Declined                                  | n.s.                        | n.s.                              |
| Kitty                | Declined                                | Declined                                 | Declined                                  | n.s.                        | n.s.                              |
| <i>High HCD</i>      |   |  |   |                             |                                   |
| Marriage             | Declined                                | Declined                                 | Accepted                                  | n.s.                        | Signif. (+)                       |
| Parenthood           | Declined                                | Declined                                 | Declined                                  | n.s.                        | Signif. (+)                       |
| Real estate purch.   | Declined                                | Declined                                 | Accepted                                  | n.s.                        | n.s.                              |

HCD = high-cost decision; n.s. = not significant; (+) = positive effect; (-) = negative effect

From a methodical point of view it is hardly any surprise that subjective precarity does not yield any significant effects, because measures for this scale comprises only retrospective data. Although it is difficult to assume subjective precarity being a time-independent measure the scale will be included in the following multivariate model for the sake of completeness.

Results concerning gender role attitudes postpone are widely in accordance with our third hypothesis, especially when their impact on high high-cost decisions such as marriage and purchasing a real estate stronger and low high-cost decisions such as first joint vacation. The following multivariate analyses will help to shed light on the question whether there are significant effects of gender role attitudes as well as objective and subjective precarity when all of this constructs are included in one model.

None of the models showed significant effects for the control variable sex so far. It will be subject to examining the following models whether this result holds true in a multivariate context. Not very surprisingly, the analysis for time till transition to parenthood revealed a positive effect of education which is in accordance with most of the empirical findings so far in family sociology. However, level of education will be included in the multivariate analyses to further clarify these issues.

## 5.5 Multivariate Analyses

In the following sections the hypothesis tests will be conducted based on multivariate Gompertz models (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 186-196) using all of the aforementioned variables as time-constant variables.<sup>18</sup> However, participants' age and time since start of the current partnership will be added as control variables to each model; with the latter one measured on a monthly basis. It has to be remembered that all of the following models are somewhat preliminary in character which explains low values for low likelihoods during this section.

### 5.5.1 Hypothesis tests for low high-cost decision

In the first multivariate model objective precarity has no significant effects on time till first joint vacation among young couples in Germany. On the other hand, subjective precarity exerts a significant, but – like in the bivariate model – negative effect: With every single step upwards on the subjective precarity time till first joint vacation decreases by 11.9 percent. However, gender role attitudes show a positive, albeit marginally significant, effect which is in conflict with the third hypothesis where it was assumed for that for low high-cost decisions time till first joint vacation should be shorter among actors with egalitarian gender role attitudes. Furthermore there is a negative effect of partnership duration: After having stayed in the same partnership for a while going on the first joint vacation becomes more and more probable.

**Table 12: Gompertz model – time till first joint vacation**

|  | Coef.        | Growth factor (%)     | SE       | 95% conf. interval |           |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------|
| Fixed-term employment<br>(rel. weights, continuous)        | .0843811     | 8.8                   | .1109573 | -.1330912          | .3018535  |
| Subjective precarity<br>(scale, 1=prec. low, 5=prec. high) | -.1266025*** | -11.9                 | .0363106 | -.19777            | -.055435  |
| Gender-role attitudes<br>(scale, 1=trad., 5=egalitarian)   | .0790371+    | 8.2                   | .0456546 | -.0104443          | .1685185  |
| Male vs. Female<br>(0=male, 1=female)                      | .0951689     | 10.0                  | .0689877 | -.0400446          | .2303824  |
| Age<br>(months, continuous)                                | .0024931***  | 0.2                   | .000704  | .0011133           | .003873   |
| Education<br>(1=lower sec. educ., 4=A levels)              | .0690319*    | 7.1                   | .338278  | .0027307           | .1353332  |
| Duration of partnership<br>(months, continuous)            | -.0253276*** | -2.5                  | .0016606 | -.0285823          | -.0220729 |
| Const.   | -.3755178*** | -                     | .2916014 | -4.326707          | -3.18365  |
| n subjects   | 1073         | Log Likelihood        |          | -1702.393          |           |
| n of failures  | 889          | Prob>chi <sup>2</sup> |          | .000               |           |
| Time at risk   | 30230        | Hazard rate           |          | .08964001          |           |
|  |              | Survival rate         |          | .91426027          |           |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; + p < .10

<sup>18</sup> Piecewise constant models (Blossfeld et al. 2007: 116-127) using time-varying variables will be used in future studies.

As a side note, there is now a positive effect of education which had already been assumed to exist during the bivariate analysis (see section 5.4.2): Those actors with high levels of education postpone the first joint vacation with their partners which, according to rational choice approaches to family institutionalization (Rusbult 1980, Rusbult et al. 1998), could be due to preferring to invest time and money in the gathering of human capital instead of leisure time. Obviously, this result should be further tested empirically using measures of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci 1985) as well as private time management strategies.

### 5.5.2 Hypothesis tests for intermediate high-cost decision

When examining time till cohabitation, there is a positive but insignificant effect of objective precarity indicating that the first hypothesis has to be declined. While subjective precarity has no significant impact either, there is a positive effect of gender role attitudes. Thus, the third hypothesis can be accepted. Except for age and duration of partnership none of the control significantly affects time till cohabitation to alter.

**Table 13: Gompertz model – time till cohabitation**

|   |       | Coef.                 | Growth factor (%) | SE         | 95% conf. interval  |
|---|-------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------------|
| Fixed-term employment (rel. weights, continuous)        |       | .1387442              | 14.9              | .1145353   | -.0857408 .3632293  |
| Subjective precarity (scale, 1=prec. low, 5=prec. high) |       | -.0409963             | -4.0              | .0376919   | -.114871 .0328784   |
| Gender-role attitudes (scale, 1=trad., 5=egalitarian)   |       | .1020818*             | 10.7              | .0464059   | .0111279 .1930356   |
| Male vs. Female (0=male, 1=female)                      |       | .0958535              | 10.1              | .0714151   | -.0441176 .2358246  |
| Age (months, continuous)                                |       | .0034137***           | 0.3               | .0007271   | .0019885 .0048389   |
| Education (1=lower sec. educ., 4=A levels)              |       | -.0256553             | -2.5              | .0348115   | -.0938845 .0425739  |
| Duration of partnership (months, continuous)            |       | -.0100736***          | -1.0***           | .0012663   | -.0125555 -.0075917 |
| Const.  |       | -4.706801***          | -                 | .3058035   | -5.306164 -4.107437 |
| n subjects  | 1073  | Log Likelihood        |                   | -1693.0379 |                     |
| n of failures   | 840   | Prob>chi <sup>2</sup> |                   | .000       |                     |
| Time at risk  | 39381 | Hazard rate           |                   | .04272991  |                     |
|   |       | Survival rate         |                   | .95817012  |                     |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; + p < .10

### 5.5.3 Hypothesis tests for high high-cost decisions

#### *Marriage*

Regarding the first type high high-cost decisions multivariate analysis yields a highly significant effect only for gender role attitudes. Resembling the results of bivariate analyses, this effect appears again to be negative. Thus, all of our hypotheses have to be declined now that also objective precarity, measured in percentages, does not exert any significant effect

anymore. Unlike in the previous models duration of partnership, like age, now has a positive effect on time till marriage indicating that our previous assumption about differentiation between low, intermediate and high high-cost decisions is empirically valid: When examining high high-cost decisions time alone does not heal the wounds of the decision – to marry, to transition to parenthood to purchase real estate<sup>19</sup> – not taken. With every month the partnership lasts longer the realization of high high-cost decisions to stabilize partnership is postponed.

**Table 14: Gompertz model – time till marriage**

|   | Coef.                  | Growth factor (%)     | SE        | 95% conf. interval |           |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
| Fixed-term employment (rel. weights, continuous)        | -.0131064              | -1.3                  | .1506776  | -.3084291          | .2822163  |
| Subjective precarity (scale, 1=prec. low, 5=prec. high) | -.0760792 <sup>+</sup> | -7.3                  | .0440204  | -.1623576          | .0101991  |
| Gender-role attitudes (scale, 1=trad., 5=egalitarian)   | -.3973802***           | -32.8                 | .0593932  | -.5137886          | -.2809717 |
| Male vs. Female (0=male, 1=female)                      | .0725236               | 7.5                   | .0899393  | -.1037542          | .2488014  |
| Age (months, continuous)                                | .007755***8            | 0.8                   | .0010178  | .005761            | .0097505  |
| Education (1=lower sec. educ., 4=A levels)              | -.0562424              | -5.5                  | .0421963  | -.1389457          | .0264608  |
| Duration of partnership (months, continuous)            | .0063332***            | 0.6                   | .0010526  | .0042701           | .0083962  |
| Const.  | -5.645512***           | -                     | .3891396  | -6.408212          | -4.882813 |
| n subjects  | 1031                   | Log Likelihood        | -931.9852 |                    |           |
| n of failures   | 550                    | Prob>chi <sup>2</sup> | .000      |                    |           |
| Time at risk  | 68412                  | Hazard rate           | .00752114 |                    |           |
|   |                        | Survival rate         | .9925071  |                    |           |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; + p < .10

#### *Transition to parenthood*

Like in the bivariate analysis objective precarity as well as gender role attitudes have no effect on time till transition to parenthood. Interestingly, there is a negative effect of subjective precarity now indicating that with every step upwards on the subjective precarity scale time till parenthood will decrease by 11.1 percent. Here it could be that subjective precarity has not the threatening effect often assumed in life-course analyses, but that people who are already used to precarious working conditions do not bother anymore to be afraid of socioeconomic risks and decide to give birth to their first child *in spite of* uncertainty. This result, indeed, has to be taken with some precaution, because there is the serious methodical restriction in that subjective precaution had been measured, in fact, retrospectively (see section 5.3).

<sup>19</sup> In the two following sections we will see that effects of duration of partnership on time till transition to parenthood and to real estate purchase will be positive, too.

Like in the previous multivariate analysis age and duration of partnership now exert positive effects while level of education – like in the bivariate analysis in section 5.4.4 – has a negative effect. In the context of our earlier discussion on successful and unsuccessful partnership institutionalization processes in times of neocapitalst landgrab, this effect seems to be in accordance with the negative effect of subjective precarity: High levels of education strengthen actors to resist socioeconomic uncertainty when being confronted with precarious working conditions and to go on – or better to say: to hurry – with the building of a family. Furthermore there is a positive effect for gender group indicating longer transition phases for women than for men. Here, future analyses should use separate models for males and females accordingly.

**Table 14: Gompertz model – time till transition to parenthood**

|  | Coef.        | Growth factor (%)     | SE         | 95% conf. interval |           |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Fixed-term employment<br>(rel. weights, continuous)        | .161888      | 17.6                  | .1557017   | -.1432816          | .4670577  |
| Subjective precarity<br>(scale, 1=prec. low, 5=prec. high) | -.1176156**  | -11.1                 | .0481808   | -.2120483          | -.023183  |
| Gender-role attitudes<br>(scale, 1=trad., 5=egalitarian)   | .0121442     | 1.2                   | .0623113   | -.1099836          | .1342721  |
| Male vs. Female<br>(0=male, 1=female)                      | .2356543**   | 26.6                  | .0983998   | .0427941           | .4285144  |
| Age<br>(months, continuous)                                | .0046915***  | 0.5                   | .0011435   | .0024503           | .0069327  |
| Education<br>(1=lower sec. educ., 4=A levels)              | -.2649696*** | -23.3                 | .0457004   | -.3545408          | -.1753984 |
| Duration of partnership<br>(months, continuous)            | .0084513***  | 0.8                   | .0011891   | .0061207           | .0107818  |
| Const.   | -5.811707*** | -                     | .4256546   | -6.645975          | -4.977439 |
| n subjects   | 1073         | Log Likelihood        | -900.43254 |                    |           |
| n of failures  | 467          | Prob>chi <sup>2</sup> | .000       |                    |           |
| Time at risk   | 77085        | Hazard rate           | .00594524  |                    |           |
|  |              | Survival rate         | .99407238  |                    |           |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; + p < .10

#### *Real estate purchase*

Compared to the results of the bivariate analyses the once significant, but ambivalent effect of objective precarity on time till real estate purchase now disappears in the multivariate analysis. The significant positive effect of gender role attitudes cannot be confirmed by multivariate analyses. Assuming that gender role attitudes are time constant this result could imply that parts of our institutionalization model are empirically valid mainly for those subjects who exhibit traditional attitudes towards gender roles. Although real estate purchase is the last step in the partnership institutionalization process among young adults in Germany when looking at the mean risktimes (see section 5.4.1) there is a strong reason to

assume that another institutionalization model is valid for those actors who show egalitarian gender role attitudes

**Table 15: Gompertz model – time till real estate purchase**

|  | Coef.        | Growth factor (%)     | SE         | 95% conf. interval |           |
|--|--------------|-----------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Fixed-term employment<br>(rel. weights, continuous)        | -.0712923    | -6.9                  | .2153745   | -.4934185          | .3508339  |
| Subjective precarity<br>(scale, 1=prec. low, 5=prec. high) | .0833122     | 8.7                   | .0654407   | -.0449493          | .2115737  |
| Gender-role attitudes<br>(scale, 1=trad., 5=egalitarian)   | -.2515489*** | -22.2                 | .0778047   | -.4040434          | -.0990545 |
| Male vs. Female<br>(0=male, 1=female)                      | .0975326     | 10.2                  | .1251566   | -.1477699          | .3428351  |
| Age<br>(months, continuous)                                | .0070017***  | 0.7                   | .0015385   | -.0039864          | .0100171  |
| Education<br>(1=lower sec. educ., 4=A levels)              | .0122666     | 1.2                   | .0583034   | -.102006           | .1265393  |
| Duration of partnership<br>(months, continuous)            | .0068241***  | 0.7                   | .0013986   | .0040828           | .0095654  |
| Const.   | -7.987088*** | -                     | .5871455   | -9.137872          | -6.836304 |
| n subjects   | 1073         | Log Likelihood        | -667.65953 |                    |           |
| n of failures  | 283          | Prob>chi <sup>2</sup> | .000       |                    |           |
| Time at risk   | 92155        | Hazard rate           | .00184677  |                    |           |
|  |              | Survival rate         | .99815494  |                    |           |

\*\*\* p < .001; \*\* p < .01; \* p < .05; + p < .10

#### 5.5.4 Summary of multivariate hypothesis tests

Comparing results of the multivariate hypothesis tests (see table 16) only time till cohabitation is positively affected by one of the two constructs of precarity. Regarding the otherwise lacking empirical support for our first two hypotheses – the higher the amount of objective and subjective precarity the longer it takes till realization of high-cost decisions to institutionalize partnerships – it seems reasonable to assume that objective as well as subjective precarity does not hamper partnership institutionalization per se. Obviously, the preliminary character of these multivariate analyses makes future empirical examination necessary, especially when it comes to implement models with time-varying constructs. Thus it is vividly important to find appropriate indicators allowing tests for empirical validity of the socioeconomic resistance assumption stated above.



**Table 16: Results of multivariate hypothesis tests**

|                      | Hyp. 1:<br>Objective<br>precarity | Hyp. 2:<br>Subjective<br>precarity | Hyp. 3:<br>Gender<br>role att. | Control:<br>Male vs.<br>female | Control:<br>Age | Control:<br>Education | Control:<br>Partnersh.<br>duration |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Low HCD</i>       |                                   |                                    |                                |                                |                 |                       |                                    |
| Vacation             | Declined                          | Declined                           | Accepted                       | n.s.                           | n.s.            | Signif. (+)           | Signif. (-)                        |
| <i>Intermed. HCD</i> |                                   |                                    |                                |                                |                 |                       |                                    |
| Cohabitation         | Declined                          | Declined                           | Accepted                       | n.s.                           | Signif. (+)     | n.s.                  | Signif. (-)                        |
| <i>High HCD</i>      |                                   |                                    |                                |                                |                 |                       |                                    |
| Marriage             | Declined                          | Declined                           | Declined                       | n.s.                           | Signif. (+)     | n.s.                  | Signif. (+)                        |
| Parenthood           | Declined                          | Declined                           | Declined                       | Signif. (+)                    | Signif. (+)     | Signif. (-)           | Signif. (+)                        |
| Real estate purch.   | Declined                          | Declined                           | Declined                       | n.s.                           | Signif. (+)     | n.s.                  | Signif. (+)                        |

HCD = high-cost decision; n.s. = not significant; (+) = positive effect; (-) = negative effect

In this context the influence of educational level as well as alternate forms of objective precarity such as temporary work, subcontracted work or – as an extreme – unemployment has to be carefully examined during future studies. What is known from qualitative analyses so far is that especially those actors with low levels of education who experienced large amounts of unemployment are in danger of being defenselessly subjected to socioeconomic uncertainty, social disintegration and exclusion (Dörre 2011, Popp/Schels 2011) which could result in severe prolongation of partnership institutionalization processes with all its – probably – negative impacts on subjective well-being.

Furthermore there is strong evidence from our earlier bivariate comparisons of survivor functions (see section 5.4) that particularly those actors with intermediate rates of objective precarity – measured as shares of fixed-term contracts among their occupational biographies – are prone to prolongation of partnership institutionalization processes. It would be theoretically and empirically gainful an endeavor to shed light on constructs that could help to clarify the impact of – several forms – of objective and subjective precarity on duration of partnership institutionalization processes in times of neocapitalist landgrab.

## 6. Concluding remarks

It was the aim of this study to provide empirical evidence that objective as well as subjective precarity leads to prolongation of partnership institutionalization processes. Based on discussions of the theory of neocapitalist landgrab as well as rational choice approaches partnership institutionalization was conceived of as a sequence of individual high-cost decisions, subdivided into three categories: *low*, *intermediate* and *high* high-cost decision. Thus, two main hypotheses were postulated: (2) The higher the share of time spent working under a fixed-term contract during an occupational biography (“objective precarity”), the longer it takes till realization of intermediate and high high-cost decisions in particular. (2) The higher the perceived uncertainty due to (hypothetically) working under fixed-term contracts (“subjective precarity”), the longer it takes till realization of intermediate and high high-cost decisions in particular. Furthermore, a third hypothesis focusing the impact of a competing social construct – changing gender role attitudes as an indicator for pluralization

of life-forms – was formulated and, later, empirically tested: (3) The more egalitarian the gender role attitudes of an actor, the longer it takes till realization of intermediate and high high-cost decisions and the shorter it takes for realization of low high-cost decisions.

Empirical results showed that there are hardly any significant *positive* effects of objective and subjective precarity on time till realization of high-cost decisions in order to institutionalize partnerships among young couples in Germany. Only results of bivariate analyses on cohabitation (intermediate high-cost decision) were partly in accordance with the aforementioned theories. In contrast, most often actors with intermediate shares of working under fixed-term contracts among their occupational biographies show the lowest transition rates in comparison to actors with low or high shares; particularly when it comes to realization of high high-cost decisions.

These results give reasons to assume that a future testing of a hypothesis formulated during the discussion of Dörre's theory of neocapitalist landgrab could be empirically futile: Precarious working arrangements do not lead to prolongation of partnership institutionalization per se, but strengthens actors' and partnerships' resistance against socioeconomic and sociopsychological uncertainties often brought into relation with fixed-term contracts, temporary or hired work under certain circumstances. It will be the task for future analyses to find out what these benefitting factors could be and, vice versa, which social groups are most vulnerable to negative effects of neocapitalist landgrab.

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